NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 69
VOLUME 23
2/-

★ New Serial WASP by ERIC FRANK RUSSELL ★

SCANNED BY ISFDB.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW WORLDS
PROFILES

Eric Frank Russell

Cheshire

Few readers need any introduction to Eric Frank Russell, who can now safely lay claim to being Britain's leading short story writer of science fiction, for Eric's name has been regularly before the reading public for the past twenty years. His debut was made in John W. Campbell, Jr's *Astounding Science Fiction*, where his best stories still appear, but it was in *Unknown Worlds* that the Russell hall-mark of excellence first became apparent with his out-standing novel, " Sinister Barrier."

The 1939-45 war put a temporary stop to his literary talents while he devoted several years to keeping the Royal Air Force on the move, but with the return of peace his output was considerably extended, and during more recent years several more novels have been added to his list as well as collections of short stories and at least one book devoted to Fortean-type mysteries—*Great World Mysteries*, published last year by Dennis Dobson Ltd., at 16/-. Dobson's, by the way, will be publishing a somewhat longer version of " Wasp " in May.

Long a devotee of Charles Fort, Russell is still active in The Fortean Society, was an original member of the British Interplanetary Society, and also attended the first British science fiction Convention held at Leeds in 1937. Needless to say, he was at the London Convention in 1957.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

VOLUME 23

No. 69

MONTHLY

MARCH 1958

CONTENTS

Serial:		
Wasp	*Eric Frank Russell*	4
Part One Of Three Parts		
Short Stories:		
Secret Weapon	*John Boland*	53
Captain Bedlam	*Harry Harrison*	67
Next of Kin	*Robert Presslie*	85
Painters of Narve	*Francis G. Rayer*	97
The Lonely One	*Robert Silverberg*	106
Article:		
Outward Bound (I)	*Kenneth Johns*	78
Features :		
Editorial	*John Carnell*	2
The Literary Line-Up	....	128
Postmortem	*The Readers*	121

Editor : JOHN CARNELL

Cover Painting by LEWIS

TWO SHILLINGS

Subscription Rates

Gaeat Britain and the Commonwealth 12 issues 28/- post free

United States of America 12 issues $5.000 post ree

Published on the last Friday of each month by

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD.,

Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1.

Sole Distributors in New Zealand :

MESSRS. P. B. FISHER, 564 Colombo Street, Christchurch, N. Z.

All characters in these stories are purely fictitious and any resemblance to living persons is entirely coincidental. No responsibility is accepted for material submitted for publication but every care will be taken to avoid loss or damage. Return postage must be included with all MSS.

Printed in England by The Rugby Advertiser Ltd., Albert Street, Rugby

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phases of S-f

Trying to guess in advance what our problematical sales will be of each issue when published is something more than a headache these days. The regular seasonal rise and fall (up in the winter, down in the summer) has become almost unpredictable since the first space satellites were launched and a large section of the community has suddenly been forcibly reminded that space travel is virtually on *their* doorsteps and not still a generation or two away.

However, despite the fact that I am constantly being informed by friends, colleagues, and well-wishers that our rising sales are due to the Sputniks, I am quite prepared to argue against the theory. Year after year our sales graph follows a recognised pattern, increases and decreases being almost entirely governed by the vagaries of the weather—with bad weather (and a corresponding increase in illness) the more reading is done. The Sputniks went up at a time when Asian 'flu was at its peak and summertime had ended—the last two factors would have brought increased sales in any case, therefore any effect the Russian space experiments may have had were of a general nature and not a specialised one as would apply to this magazine.

This leads to still further interesting conjecture. I understand from a correspondent in New York that despite the general interest in space travel in America, the sales of science fiction magazines have dropped slightly in recent months. This at a time when the American national press, both magazine and newspaper, is virtually "flogging to death" the subject of interplanetary travel! In view of such wide publicity there must be a vast new potential readership which has hitherto been untouched by the American magazine publishers—if only a small percentage of this untapped source were to buy one magazine a month sales would double over night, yet if anything the response is lower than before last October.

I think there is a simple enough reason for this—a factor I have pointed out in earlier editorials. The science fiction magazines are too specialised for the general market and rely almost entirely on their own 'closed-shop' type of readership. Readers in this field are made, not born to it, and it takes several years for such a reader to graduate to the stage

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where he can fully appreciate and understand most of the deeper complexities of plot and theory promulgated by most of the leading writers (who were, at one stage, just such readers themselves).

As an example of this reasoning, you must read the letter by Mr. Bryan Welham in the " Postmortem " section at the back of this issue. He complains that the stories in this magazine are boring, gives his reasons and asks for more human interest. Basically I think that his complaint is one against magazine science fiction in general and not this magazine in particular as subsequent correspondence between us revealed that he and his friends are in the under-20's. He has now reached the stage where the short story no longer appeals because there is insufficient length for the author to develop both scientific context and characterisation. Only in the novel will he find the two combined in a satisfactory manner.

Casual new readers to science fiction undoubtedly find the same dissatisfaction in the magazines although they probably cannot define the reason. Or don't bother.

Even with regular readers who have been interested in the science fiction field for the past twenty years or more, I find there are high's and low's of interest in the genre, sometimes to the extent of ceasing to read the literature for several years at a stretch. These ' low ' periods always coincide with outside factors involving a change of job, moving to a new neighbourhood, marriage, the arrival of a family, increased study —in fact *any* change in the norm plays a prominent part in the temporary decline of a person's reading habits. Science fiction, however, has that elusive ' something ' which always draws a reader back again with renewed interest.

At the moment there is a greatly increased interest in science fiction—although an early Spring could well force a decline —and we are receiving lots of interesting letters from readers all over the world. As long as these keep coming in we will devote space to them in the " Postmortem " section—it's up to you.

John Carnell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WASP

More or less harmless under normal circumstances, a single wasp, however, can be highly dangerous to human beings — given the right set of circumstances. It was James Mowry's task to become a human wasp in the war between Earth and the Sirian Empire. In his case he made his own circumstances

By Eric Frank Russell

Part One of Three Parts

I

He ambled into the room, sat in the indicated chair and said nothing. The baffled expression had been on his face quite a time and he was getting a bit tired of wearing it.

The big fellow who had brought him all the way from Alaska now departed, silently closing the door and leaving him alone with the man contemplating him from behind the desk. A small plaque informed that this character's name was William Wolf.

Wolf said in hard, even tones, "Mr. Mowry, you are entitled to an explanation." A pause, followed by, "You will get one." Then he stared unblinkingly at his listener.

For a long-drawn minute James Mowry suffered the intent scrutiny before he asked, "When?"

"Soon."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With that, Wolf went on staring at him. The gaze was unpleasantly piercing, analytical, and the face around it was about as warm and expressive as a lump of hard rock.

"Mind standing up?"

Mowry stood up.

"Turn around."

He rotated, looking bored.

"Walk to and fro across the room."

He walked.

"Tsk-tsk!" grunted Wolf in a way that indicated neither pleasure nor pain. "I assure you, Mr. Mowry, that I am quite serious when I ask you to oblige by walking bow-legged."

Splaying his knees as much as possible, Mowry stumped around as if riding an invisible horse. Then he resumed his chair and said pointedly, "There'd better be money in this. I don't come three thousand miles and make like a clown for nothing."

"There's no money in it, not a cent," informed Wolf. "If lucky, there is life."

"And if out of luck?"

"Death."

"You're damnably frank about it," Mowry commented.

"In this job I have to be." Wolf stared at him again, long and penetratingly. "You'll do. Yes, I'm sure you'll do."

"Do for what?"

"I'll tell you in a moment." Opening a drawer, he extracted some papers, passed them across. "These will enable you better to understand the position. Read them through—they lead up to what follows."

Mowry glanced at them. They were typescript copies of press reports. Settling back in his chair he perused them slowly and with care.

The first told of a prankster in Roumania. This fellow had done nothing more than stand in the road gazing fascinatedly at the sky, occasionally uttering ejaculations and loud phrases such as, "Blue flames!" Curious people had joined him and gaped likewise. The group became a crowd, the crowd became a mob, and the bigger the mob the faster it grew.

Soon the audience blocked the street, overflowed into side-streets. Police tried to break it up, making matters worse. Some fool summoned the fire squads. Hysterics on the fringes swore they could see or had seen something weird

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

above the clouds. Reporters and cameramen rushed to the scene. Rumours raced around. The government sent up the air force for a closer look. Panic spread over an area of two hundred square miles from which the original cause had judiciously disappeared.

" Amusing if nothing else," remarked Mowry.

" Read on."

The second report concerned a daring escape from jail of two notorious killers. They had stolen a car, made six hundred miles before recapture. Their term of freedom had lasted exactly fourteen hours.

The third detailed an automobile accident. Three killed, one seriously injured, the car a complete wreck. The sole survivor had died nine hours later.

Handing back the papers, Mowry said, " What's all this to me ? "

" We'll take those reports in the order as read," began Wolf. " They prove something of which we've long been aware but maybe you haven't realised yourself. For the first one, that Roumanian did nothing, positively nothing save stare at the sky and mumble. All the same, he persuaded a government to start jumping around like fleas on a hot griddle. It shows that in given conditions action and reaction can be hopelessly out of proportion. Also that by doing insignificant things in suitable circumstances one can obtain results monstrously in excess of the effort."

" I'll give you that," Mowry conceded.

" Now the lamsters. They didn't do much either ; climbed a wall, grabbed a car, drove like mad until the petrol ran out, got caught." He leaned forward, continued with added emphasis, " But for most of fourteen hours they monopolised the attention of six planes, ten helicopters, one hundred and twenty patrol-cars, eighteen telephone exchanges, uncountable phone lines and radio link-ups, not to mention police, deputies, posses of volunteers, hunters, trackers, forest rangers and National Guardsmen to a grand total of twenty-seven thousand scattered over three states."

" Phew !" Mowry raised his eyebrows.

" Finally, let's consider this auto smash. We know the cause ; the survivor was able to tell us before he died. He said the driver lost control at high speed while swiping at a wasp which had flown in through a window and started buzzing around his face."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" It nearly happened to me once."

Ignoring that, Wolf went on, " The weight of a wasp is under half an ounce. Compared with a human being its size is minute, its strength negligible. Its sole armament is a tiny syringe holding a drop of irritant, formic acid, and in this case it didn't even use it. Nevertheless it killed four big men and converted a large, powerful car into a heap of scrap."

" I see the point," agreed Mowry, " but where do I come in ?"

" Right here," said Wolf. " We want you to become a wasp."

Leaning back, Mowry eyed the other contemplatively, then commented, " The muscle-bound lug who brought me here was a Secret Service agent who had satisfied me as to the genuineness of his credentials. This is a government department. You're a high-ranking official. But for those facts I'd say you're crazy."

" Maybe I am," gave back Wolf, blank-faced, " but I don't think so."

" You want me to do something ? "

" Yes."

" Something extra-special ? "

" Yes."

" At risk of death ? "

" I'm afraid so."

" And for no reward ? "

" Correct."

Mowry stood up, reached for his hat. " I'm not crazy either."

" You will be," said Wolf, in the same flat tones, " if you rest content to let the Sirians kick us out of existence."

Letting go the hat, Mowry sat down again. " Wha d'you mean ?"

" There's a war on."

" Well, what have we to worry about ?"

" Wars must be won or lost and there's no third alternative. We cannot win merely by keeping the foe at arm's length. We can never gain victory solely by postponing defeat." Suddenly and emphatically he slammed a heavy fist on his desk and made a pen leap two feet into the air. " We've got to do more than that. We've *got* to seize the initiative and get the enemy flat on his back while we beat the bejazus out of him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But we'll get around to that in due course, won't we?"

"Maybe," said Wolf. "Or maybe not. It depends."

"Depends upon what?"

"Whether we make full and intelligent use of our resources, especially people—meaning people such as you."

"You could be more specific," Mowry suggested.

"Look, in technical matters we are ahead of the Sirian Combine, a little ahead in some respects and far ahead in others. That gives us the advantage of better weapons, more efficient armaments. But what the public does not know—because nobody has seen fit to tell them is that the Sirians also have an advantage. They outnumber us by twelve to one and outweigh us by material in the same proportion."

"Is that a fact?"

"Unfortunately it is, though our propagandists don't bother to mention it. Our war-potential is superior qualitatively. The Sirians have superiority quantitatively. That's a very serious handicap to us. We've got to counter it in the best way we know how. It won't be done by playing for time while we make the effort to breed like flies."

"I see." Mowry gnawed his bottom lip, looked thoughtful.

"However," Wolf went on, "the problem becomes less formidable than it looks if we bear in mind that one man can shake a government, two men temporarily can pin down an army twenty-seven thousands strong, or one small wasp can slay four comparative giants and destroy their huge machine into the bargain." He paused, watching the other for effect, continued, "Which means that by scrawling suitable words upon a wall, the right man in the right place at the right time might immobilise an armoured division with the aid of nothing more than a piece of chalk."

"You're concocting a pretty unorthodox form of warfare."

"So much the better."

"I am sufficiently perverse to like such methods. They appeal to me."

"We know," said Wolf. He took a file from his desk, thumbed through it. "Upon your fourteenth birthday you were fined one hundred Sirian guilders for expressing your opinion of an official, upon a wall, in letters twenty inches high. Your father apologised on your behalf and pleaded the impetuosity of youth. The Sirians were annoyed but let the matter drop."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Razaduth was a scheming, pot-bellied liar and I say it again." Mowry eyed the file. "That my life-story you've got there?"

"Yes."

"Nosey lot, aren't you?"

"We have to be. Regard it as part of the price to be paid for survival." Shoving the file to one side, Wolf informed, "We've a punched card for every Terran in existence. In no time worth mentioning we can sort out electronically all those who have false teeth, or wear size eleven shoes, or had red-haired mothers, or can be relied upon to try dodge the draft. Without trouble we can extract any specified type of sheep from the general mass of sheep and goats."

"And I am a specified sheep?"

"Speaking metaphorically, of course. No insult is intended." His face gave a craggy twitch that was the nearest it could come to a smile. "We first dug out about sixteen thousand completely fluent speakers of the several Sirian dialects. Eliminating the females and children brought the number down to nine thousand. Then, step by step, we cut out the elderly, the infirm, the weak, the untrustworthy, the temperamentally unsuitable, those too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, too stupid, too rash, too cautious, and so forth. We weren't left with many among whom to seek for wasps."

"What defines a wasp?"

"Several things—but mostly a shorty who can walk slightly bandy-legged with his ears pinned back and his face dyed purple. In other words, one who can play the part of a native-born Sirian and do it well enough to fool the Sirians."

"Never!" exclaimed Mowry. "Never in a month of Sundays! I'm pink, I've got wisdom teeth and my ears stick out."

"The surplus teeth can be pulled. Surgical removal of a sliver of cartilege will fasten your ears back good and tight, leaving no visible evidence of the operation. Painless and easy, with complete healing in two weeks. That is medical evidence, so don't argue it." Again the craggy twitch. "As for the purple complexion, it's nothing startling. There are some Terrans a good deal more purple-faced than any Sirian, they having acquired the colour via many gallons of booze. We can fix you up with a dye guaranteed firm for four months, also a retinting kit that will enable you to carry on as much longer as may be necessary."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" But—"

" Listen to me. You were born in Masham, capital city of Diracta which is the Sirian home planet. Your father was a trader there at the time. You lived on Diracta until age seventeen when you returned with your parents to Terra. Luckily you happen to be a half-pint of just about Sirian size and build. You are now twenty-six and still speak perfect Sirian with a decided Mashambi accent which, if anything, is an advantage. It lends plausibility. About fifty million Sirians speak with Mashambi accents. You're a natural for the job we have in mind."

" What if I invite you to thrust the job right up the air-shaft?" asked Mowry, with great interest.

" I would regret it," said Wolf coldly, " because in time of war it is an old, well-founded adage that one volunteer is worth a thousand conscripts."

" Meaning I'd get my call-up papers?" Mowry made a gesture of irritation. " Damn!—I'd rather walk into something of my own accord than be frogmarched into it."

" So it says here," informed Wolf, motioning toward the file. " James Mowry, twenty-six, restless and pigheaded. Can be trusted to do anything at all—provided the alternative is worse."

" Sounds like my father. Did he tell you that?"

" The Service does not reveal its sources of information."

" Humph!" He pondered a little while, asked, " Suppose I volunteer, what follows?"

" We'll send you to a school. It runs a special course that is fast and tough and takes six to eight weeks. You'll be crammed to the gills with everything likely to be useful to you: weapons, explosives, sabotage, propaganda, psychological warfare, map reading, compass reading, camouflage, judo, radio techniques and maybe a dozen other subjects. By the time they've finished with you, you'll be fully qualified to function as a complete and absolute pain-in-the-neck."

" And after that?"

" You will be dropped surreptitiously upon a Sirian-held planet and be left to make yourself as awkward as possible."

There was a lengthy silence at the end of which Mowry gave begrudgingly, " Once when my father was thoroughly aggravated he said, 'Son, you were born a fool and you'll die a fool.'" He let go a long, deep sigh. " The old man was dead right. I hereby volunteer."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" We knew you would," said Wolf, imperturbably.

He saw Wolf again, that being two days after he had finished the arduous course and passed with satisfactory marks. Wolf arrived at the school, visited him in his room.

" What was it like ? "

" Sheer sadism," said Mowry, pulling a face. " So almighty tough that I'm beaten up in mind and body. I feel like a half-stunned cripple."

" You'll have plenty of time to get over that. The journey will take long enough. You're leaving Thursday."

" For where ? "

" Sorry, I can't tell you. Your pilot carries sealed orders to be opened only on the last lap. In case of accident or successful interception he destroys them unread."

" What's the likelihood of us being grabbed on the way there ? "

" Not great. Your ship will be considerably faster than anything the enemy possesses. But even the best of vessels can get into trouble once in a while. We're taking no chances. You know the stinking reputation of the Sirian Security Police, the Kaitempi. They can make a slab of granite grovel and confess its sins. If they snatch you en route and learn your intended destination they'll take counter-measures and try to trap your successor on arrival."

" My successor ? That raises a question nobody here seems willing to answer. Maybe you can tell me, huh ? "

" What is it ?" asked Wolf.

" Will I be entirely on my own ? Or will other Terrans be operating on the same planet ? If there will be others, how shall I make contact ?"

" So far as you're concerned you'll be the only Terran for a hundred million miles around," responded Wolf. " You will have no contacts. By the same token, you won't be able to betray anyone to the Kaitempi. Nothing they can do will extract from you information that you don't possess. Maybe you'll sweat and scream and invent stuff to make them lay off, but it won't be genuine information."

" I shall return," assured Mowry, " though the way be flinty and the road be long."

That, he thought as Wolf departed, was more of a pious hope than a performable promise. To be dropped single-handed upon a hostile planet was to be plunged neck-deep

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into a genuinely menacing situation. Casualties could be expected sooner or later. Indeed, Wolf's remark about 'your successor' showed that losses had been anticipated and steps taken to provide replacements.

Oh, well, he had committed himself and there was no backing out. Looked like he was doomed to become a hero from sheer lack of courage to be a coward. Slowly he developed a philosophic resignation which still possessed him several weeks later when the corvette's captain summoned him to the mid-cabin.

"Sleep well?"

"Not in the last spell," Mowry admitted. "The propulsors were noisier than usual, the whole ship shuddered and creaked. I spent most of the time lying in my bunk and inventing new cuss-words."

The captain gave a wry smile. "You didn't know it, but we were being chased by four Sirian destroyers. We hit up top speed and lost them."

"You sure they aren't still tracking us?"

"They've fallen behind range of our detectors, therefore we're beyond range of theirs."

"Thank heavens for that," said Mowry.

"I've opened the orders. We're due to arrive in forty-eight Earth hours."

"Where?"

"On a planet called Jaimec. Ever heard of it?"

"Yes, the Sirian news-channels used to mention it every once in a while. It's one of their outpost worlds if I remember aright, under-populated and not half developed. I never met anyone from there and so don't know much about it." He registered mild annoyance. "This secretiveness is all very well, but it would help a fellow some to let him know where he's going and give him some useful information about the place before he gets there. Ignorance could prove damn dangerous; it might cost me my neck .Maybe I'm finicky but I value my neck."

"You'll land with all the data we've got," soothed the captain. "They've supplied a stack of stuff along with the orders." He put a wad of papers on the table, also several maps and a number of large photographs. Then he pointed to a cabinet standing against a wall. "That's the stereoscopic viewer. Use it to search these pics for a suitable landing place. The choice is wholly yours. My job is to put you down safely wherever you choose and get away undetected."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" How long have I got ?"

" You must show me the selected spot not later than forty hours from now."

" And how long can you allow for dumping me and my equipment ?"

" Twenty minutes maximum. Positively no more. I'm sorry about that but it can't be helped. If we sit on the ground and take it easy we'll leave unmistakable signs of our landing, a whacking big rut that can soon be spotted by air patrols and will get the hunt after you in full cry. So we'll have to use the antigravs and move fast. The antigravs soak up power. Twenty minutes' output is the most we can afford."

" All right." Mowry gave a shrug of resignation, took up the papers and started reading them as the captain went out.

Jaimec, ninety-fourth planet of the Sirian Empire. Mass seven-eighths that of Terra. Land area about half that of Terra's, the rest being ocean. First settled two and a half centuries ago. Present population estimated at about eighty millions. Jaimec had cities, railroads, spaceports and all the other features of alien civilisation. Nevertheless, much of it remained undeveloped, unexplored and in primitive condition.

He spent a good many hours making a close, meticulous study of the planet's surface as shown in the stereoscopic viewer, meanwhile wondering how the big photos had been obtained. Evidently someone had taken a considerable risk to play close with an aerial camera. War had a hundred unsung heroes for every one praised and draped with medals.

By the fortieth hour he had made his choice. It had not been easy to reach a decision. Every seemingly suitable dropping-place had some kind of disadvantage, proving yet again that the ideal hideout does not exist. One would be beautifully positioned from the strategic viewpoint but lack adequate cover. Another would have first-class natural concealment but dangerous location.

The captain came in saying, " I hope you've picked a point on the night-side. If it isn't, we'll have to dodge around until dark and that's not good. The best technique is to go in and get out before they've time to take alarm and organise a counter blow."

" This is it." Mowry indicated the place on a photo. " It's a lot farther from a road than I'd have liked, about twenty miles and all of it through virgin forest. Whenever I need

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something out the cache it will take me a day's hard going to reach it, maybe two days. But by the same token it should remain safe from prying eyes and that's the prime consideration."

Sliding the photo into the viewer, the captain switched on the interior lighting and looked into the rubber eyepiece. He frowned with concentration.

"You mean that marked spot on the cliff?"

"No—it's at the cliff's base. See that outcrop of rock? What's a fraction north of it?"

The captain stared again. "It's hard to tell for certain but it looks mighty like a cave formation." He backed off, picked up the intercom phone. "Hame, come here, will you?"

Hamerton, the chief navigator arrived and studied the photo, found the indicated point. He compared it with a two-hemisphere map of Jaimec, made swift calculations.

"We'll catch it on the night side but only by the skin of our teeth."

"You sure of that?"

"If we went straight there we'd make it with a couple of hours to spare. But we daren't go straight; their radar network would plot the dropping-point to within half a mile. So we'll have to dodge around below their radar horizon. Evasive action takes time but with luck we can complete the drop half an hour before sunrise."

They went out, leaving him to brood. Presently the alarm-gong clanged upon the cabin wall, he grabbed handholds and hung on while the ship made a couple of violent swerves, first one way, then the other. He could see nothing, hear nothing save the dull moan of steering-jets, but his imagination pictured a cluster of fifty ominous vapour-trails rising from below, fifty long, explosive cylinders eagerly sniffing around for the scent of alien metal.

Eleven more times the alarm sounded, followed at once by aerial acrobatics. By now the ship resounded to the soft whistle of passing atmosphere which built up to a faint howl as it thickened.

Getting near now.

Mowry gazed absently at his fingers. They were steady but sweaty. There were queer electric thrills running up and down his spine. His knees felt weak and his stomach felt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weaker. He prayed for enough resolution to land without spewing in plain sight of everybody. Hell of a hero he'd look if he did that.

Far away across the void was a planet with a fully comprehensive card-system and because of that he was about to have his pointed head shoved into the lion's mouth. Mentally he damned card-systems those who'd invented them those who operated them. The cussing relieved his feelings somewhat but did not restore strength to his knees.

With the arrival so close the philosophic resignation that had sustained him had now evaporated. He fidgeted nervily around, occasionally grabbing the handholds, heartily wishing the whole dirty business were done with and over.

By the time propulsion ceased and the ship stood silently upon its antigravs above the selected spot he had generated the fatalistic impatience of a man facing a major operation that no longer can be avoided. He half-ran, half-slid down the nylon ladder to ground. A dozen of the corvette's crew followed, equally in a hurry but for different reasons. They worked like maniacs, all the time keeping a wary eye upon the sky.

II

The cliff was part of an upthrust plateau rising four hundred feet above the forest. At the bottom were two caves, one wide and shallow, one narrow but deep. Before the caves stretched a beach of tiny pebbles at the edge of which a small stream swirled and bubbled.

Cylindrical duralumin containers, thirty in all, were lowered from the ship's belly to the beach, seized and carried to the back of the deep cave, stacked so that the code numbers on their lids faced the light. That done, the twelve scrambled monkeylike up the ladder which was promptly reeled in. An officer waved a hand from the open lock, shouted a last word of encouragement.

"Give 'em hell, Sonny."

The corvette's tail snorted and whumped, making trees wave their tops in a mile-long lane of superheated air. That in itself added to the list of possible risks; if the leaves got scalded, withered and changed colour, a scouting aeroplane would view the phenomenon as a gigantic arrow pointing to the cave. But it was a chance that had to be taken. With

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swiftly increasing speed the big vessel went away, keeping low and turning in the distance to follow the valley northward.

Watching it depart, Mowry knew that it would not yet head straight for home. First the crew would take added chances for his sake by zooming in plain view over a number of cities and military strongholds. With luck this tactic might persuade the enemy to jump to the conclusion that it was engaged in photographic reconnaissance, that no surreptitious landing of personnel had been intended or performed.

The testing time would come during the long hours of daylight and already dawn was breaking to one side. Systematic aerial search in the vicinity would prove that the enemy's suspicions had been aroused in spite of the corvette's misleading antics. Lack of visible search would not prove the contrary because for all he knew the hunt might be up elsewhere, in the wrong place far beyond his sight and hearing.

After an hour he entered the cave, opened a container, drew from it a well-worn leather case of indisputable Sirian manufacture. There'd be no sharp eyes noting something foreign-looking about that piece of luggage ; it was his own property purchased in Masham, on Diracta, many years ago.

Making an easy jump across the little stream he went into the forest and headed westward, frequently checking his direction with the aid of a pocket compass. The going proved rough but not difficult. The forest was wholly a forest and not a jungle. Trees grew large and close together, forming a canopy that shut out all but occasional glimpses of the sky. Luckily, undergrowth was sparse. One could walk with ease and at fast pace providing one took care not to fall over projecting roots. Also, as he soon realised, progress was helped quite a piece by the fact that on Jaimec his weight was down by most of twenty pounds while his luggage was reduced in the same proportion.

Two hours before sunset he reached the road, having covered twenty miles with one stop for a meal and many brief pauses to consult the compass. Behind a roadside tree he upended the case, sat on it and enjoyed fifteen minutes' rest before making wary survey of the road. So far he'd heard no planes or scout-ships snooping overhead in frantic search of Terra's one-man task force. Neither was there any abnormal activity upon the road ; in fact during his wait nothing passed along it in either direction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Refreshed by the sit, he tidied himself, brushed dirt and leaves from his shoes and pants, reknotted his typical neck-scarf as only a Sirian could knot it. Then he examined himself in a steel mirror. His Earthmade copy of Sirian clothes would pass muster, he had no doubt of that. His purple face, pinned-back ears and Mashambi accent would be equally convincing. But his greatest protection would be the mental block in every Sirian's mind ; they'd just naturally not think of an Earthman masquerading as a Sirian because the idea was too ridiculous to contemplate.

Satisfied that he fitted his role a hundred percent, he emerged from the shelter of the trees, walked boldly across the road and from the other side made careful study of his exit from the forest. It was essential that he should be able to remember it speedily and accurately. The forest was the screen of camouflage around his bolt-hole and there was no telling when he might need to dive into it in a deuce of a hurry.

Fifty yards farther along the road stood an especially tall tree with a peculiarly wrapped growth around its trunk and a very gnarly branch formation. He fixed it firmly in his mind and for good measure lugged a tablet-shaped slab of stone onto the grass verge and stood it upright beneath the tree.

The result resembled a lonely grave. He stared at the stone and with no trouble at all could imagine words inscribed upon it : *James Mowry—Terran. Strangled by the Kaitempi.* Could be an omen, a forecast that already he had signed his own death warrant. There was a compensatory comfort : he did not believe in omens.

Dismissing ugly thoughts about the Kaitempi, he started trudging along the road, his gait suggestive of a slight bow-leggedness. From now on he must be wholly a Sirian, physically and mentally, name of Shir Agavan a forestry surveyor employed by the Jaimec Ministry of Natural Resources, therefore a government official and exempt from military service. Or he could be anyone else so long as he remained plainly and visibly a Sirian and could produce the papers to prove it.

More than a mile had been covered before two dynocars and one gas-truck passed him in quick succession, all going the opposite way. None of the occupants favoured him with more than a perfunctory glance. Another mile went by before anything came in his own direction. This was another gas-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

truck, a big, dirty, lumbering monstrosity that wheezed and grunted as it rolled along.

Standing by the verge, he waved it down, putting on an air of arrogant authority that never failed to impress all Sirians save those with more arrogance and authority. The truck stopped jerkily and with a tailward boost of fumes. It was loaded with about twenty tons of edible roots. Two Sirians looked down at him from the cab. They were unkempt, their clothes baggy and soiled.

"I am of the government," informed Mowry, giving the statement the right degree of importance. "I wish a ride into town."

The nearest one opened the door, moved closer to the driver and made room. Mowry climbed up, squeezed into the bench-seat which was a close fit for three. He held his case on his knees. The truck emitted a loud bang and lurched forward while the Sirian in the middle gazed dully at the case.

"You are a Mashamban, I think," ventured the driver, conversationally.

"Correct. Seems we can't open our mouths without betraying the fact."

"I have never been to Masham," continued the driver, using the sing-song accents peculiar to Jaimec. "I would like to go there someday. It is a great place." He switched to his fellow Sirian. "Isn't it, Snat?"

"Yar," said Snat, still mooning at the case.

"Besides, Masham or anywhere on Diracta should be a lot safer than here. And perhaps I'd have better luck there. It has been a bad day. It has been a stinking bad day. Hasn't it, Snat?"

"Yar," said Snat.

"Why?" asked Mowry.

"This *soko* of a truck has broken down three times since dawn. And it has stuck in the bog twice. The last time we had to empty it to get it out, and then refill it. With the load we've got that is work. Hard work." He spat out the window. "Wasn't it, Snat?"

"Yar," said Snat, still half-dead from the effort.

"Too bad," Mowry sympathised.

"As for the rest, you know of it," said the driver, irefully. "It has been a bad day."

"I know of what?" Mowry prompted.

"The news."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have been in the woods since sunup. One does not hear news in the woods."

"The ten-time radio announced an increase in the war-tax. As if we aren't paying enough. Then the twelve-time radio said a Spakum ship had been zooming around. They had to admit it because the ship was fired upon from a number of places. We are not deaf when guns fire, nor blind when the target is visible." He nudged his fellow. "Are we, Snat?"

"Nar," confirmed Snat.

"Just imagine that—a lousy Spakum ship sneaking around over our very roof-tops. You know what *that* means: they are seeking targets for bombing. Well, I hope none of them get through. I hope every Spakum that heads this way runs straight into a break-up barrage."

"So do I," said Mowry, squirting pseudo-patriotism out of his ears. He gave his neighbour a dig in the ribs. "Don't you?"

"Yar," said Snat.

For the rest of the journey the driver maintained his paean of anguish about the general lousiness of the day, the iniquity of truck-builders, the menace and expense of war and the blatant impudence of an enemy ship that had surveyed Jaimec in broad daylight. All the time Snat lolled in the middle of the cab, gaped glassy-eyed at Mowry's leather case and responded in monosyllables only when metaphorically beaten over the head.

"This will do," announced Mowry as they trundled through city suburbs and reached a wide crossroad. The truck stopped, he got down. "Live long!"

"Live long!" responded the driver and tooled away.

He stood on the sidewalk and thoughtfully watched the truck until it passed from sight. Well, he'd put himself to the first minor test and got by without suspicion. Neither the driver nor Snat had nursed the vaguest idea that he was what they called a Spakum—literally a bed-bug—an abusive term for Terrans to which he'd listened with no resentment whatsoever. Nor should he resent it: until further notice he was Shir Avagan, a Sirian born and bred.

Holding tight to his case, he entered the city.

This was Pertane, capital of Jaimec, population a little more than two millions. No other place on the planet approached

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it in size. It was the centre of Jaimecan civil and military administration, the very heart of the foe's planetary stronghold. By the same token it was potentially the most dangerous area in which a lone Terran could wander on the loose.

Reaching the downtown section, Mowry tramped around until twilight, weighed up the location and external appearance of several small hotels. Finally he picked one in a side-street off the main stem. Quiet and modest-looking, it would serve for a short time while he sought a better hideout. But having reached a decision he did not go straight in.

First it was necessary to make an up-to-the-minute check of his papers lest anything wrong with them should put a noose around his neck. The documents with which he had been provided were microscopically accurate replicas of those valid within the Sirian Empire nine or ten months ago. They might have changed the format in the interim. To present for examination papers obviously long out of date was to ask to be nabbled on the spot.

He'd be trapped in an hotel, behind doors, with Sirians all around. Better the open street where if it came to the worst he could throw away his case along with his bandy-legged gait and run like the devil in pursuit of a virgin. So he ambled casually past the hotel, explored nearby streets until he found a policeman. Glancing swiftly around, he marked his get-away route and went up to the officer.

"Pardon, I am a newcomer." He said it stupidly, wearing an expression of slight dopiness. "I arrived from Diracta a few days ago."

"You are lost, *hi*?"

"No, officer, I am embarrassed." He fumbled in a pocket, produced his identity-card, offered it for inspection. His leg muscles were tensed in readiness for swift and effective flight as he went on, "A Pertanian friend tells me that my card is wrong because it must now bear a picture of my nude body. This friend is a persistent prankster. I do not know whether he is to be believed."

Frowning, the policeman examined the card's face. He turned it over, studied its back. Then he returned it to Mowry.

"This card is quite in order. Your friend is a liar. There is no such silly regulation. He would be wise to keep his mouth shut." The frown grew deeper. "If he does not he will someday regret it. The Kaitempi are rough with those who spread false rumours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, officer," said Mowry, vastly relieved but looking suitably frightened. "I shall warn him not to be a fool. May you live long!"

"Live long!" said the policeman, curtly.

Hurrah! He went back to the hotel, walked in as though he owned it, said to the clerk, "I wish a room with bath for ten days."

"Your instrument of identity?"

He passed the card across.

The clerk wrote down its details, handed it back, reversed the register on the counter and pointed to a line. "Sign here."

On taking the room his first act was to have a welcome wash. Then he reviewed his position. He had reserved the room for ten days but that was mere camouflage since he had no intention of staying that long in a place so well surveyed by official eyes. If Sirian habits held good for Jaimec he could depend upon some snoop examining the hotel register and, perhaps, asking awkward questions before the week was through. He had all the answers ready—but the correct wasp-tactic is not to be asked so long as it can be avoided.

He'd arrived too late in the day to seek and find better sanctuary. Tomorrow would be well-spent hunting and finding a rooming-house, preferably in a district where inhabitants tended to mind their own business. Meanwhile he could put in two or three hours before bedtime by exploring Pertane, studying the lie of the land and estimating future possibilities.

For the rest of the evening his exploration of Pertane was not as haphazard as it looked. He wandered around with seeming aimlessness, memorising all geographical features that might prove useful to recall later on. But primarily he was seeking to estimate the climate of public opinion with particular reference to minority opinions.

By midnight he was back at the hotel confident that in Pertane there lived an adequate supply of scapegoats. On buses and in bars he'd had fragmentary conversations with about forty citizens and had overheard the talk of a hundred more.

Not one had uttered a word definable as unpatriotic, much less treacherous or subversive. Strong, deep-rooted fear of the Kaitempi was more than enough to deter them from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

condemning themselves out of their own mouths. But at least a tenth of them had spoken with that vague, elusive air of having more on their minds than they cared to state. In some cases two of this type conversed together and when that happened it was done with a sort of conspiratorial understanding that any onlooker could recognise from fifty yards away but could never produce as evidence before a military court.

Yes, these—the objectors, the selfish, the greedy, the resentful, the conceited, the moral cowards and the criminals—could all be utilised for Terran purposes. When it isn't expedient to use one's own strength, then is the time to exploit the enemy's weakness.

While lying in bed and waiting for sleep to come, he mentally enrolled the whole of this secret opposition in a mythical, dreamed-up organisation called *Dirac Angestun Gesept*, the Sirian Freedom Party. He then appointed himself the D.A.G.'s president, secretary, treasurer and field-director for the planetary district of Jaimec. The fact that the entire membership was unaware of its status and had no hand in the election did not matter a hoot. It was irrelevant.

Neither did it matter that sooner or later the aggravated Kaitempi would start organising the collection of members' dues in the form of strangled necks, or that some members might be so lacking in enthusiasm for the cause as to resist payment. If some Sirians could be given the full-time job of hunting down and garroting other Sirians, and if other Sirians could be given the full-time job of dodging or shooting down the garroters, then a distant and different lifeform would be saved a few unpleasant chores.

With that happy thought James Mowry alias Shir Agavan dozed off. His breathing was suspiciously slow and regular for the purple-faced lifeform he was supposed to be, his snores were abnormally low-pitched and he snoozed flat on his back instead of lying on his belly. But in the privacy of this room there were none to hear and see a Terran with his defences momentarily down.

When one man is playing the part of an invading army the essential thing is to move fast, make full use of any and every opportunity, waste no effort. Mowry had to traipse around the city to find a better hideout. It was equally necessary to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go hither and thither to make the first moves in his game. So he combined the two purposes.

He unlocked his bag, opening it carefully with the aid of a special non-conducting plastic key. Despite that he knew exactly what he was doing a thin trickle of sweat ran down his spine while he did it. The lock was not as innocent as it looked, in fact it was a veritable death-trap. He could never quite get rid of the feeling that one of these days it might forget that a plastic key is not a metal lock-pick. If ever it did so blunder the resulting blast-area would have a radius of one hundred yards.

Apart from the lethal can wired to the lock, the bag held a dozen small parcels, a mass of printed paper and nothing else. The paper was of two kinds: stickers and money. There was plenty of the latter. In terms of Sirian guilders he was a millionaire. Or with the further supply in that distant cave he was a multi-millionaire.

From the bag he took an inch-thick wad of printed stickers. Not too many of them. Just enough for a day's fast work and, at the same time, few enough to toss away unobserved should the necessity arise. That done, he refastened the bag with the same care, the same beading of perspiration.

It was a tricky business, this continual fiddling with a potential explosion, but it had one great advantage. If any official nosey-poke took it into his head to search the room and check the luggage he would destroy the evidence along with himself. Moreover, proof of what had happened would be widespread enough to give clear warning to the homecomer: Mowry would turn into the street, take one look at the mess and discreetly fade from sight.

Departing, he caught a cross-town bus, planted the first sticker on the front window of its upper deck at a moment when all other seats were vacant. He dismounted at the next stop, casually watched a dozen people boarding the bus. Half of them went upstairs.

The sticker said in bold, easily readable print: *War makes wealth for the few, misery for the many. At the right time Dirac Angestun Gesept will punish the former, bring aid and comfort to the latter.*

That would hit the readers much harder than it would have done a month ago. It was sheer luck that he'd arrived coincidentally with a big boost in the war-tax. It was likely they'd feel sufficiently aggrieved not to tear the sticker down in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

patriotic fury. Chances were equally good that they'd spread the news about this new, mysterious movement that had emerged to challenge the government, the military caucus and the Kaitempi.

Within five and a half hours he'd got rid of eighty stickers without once being caught in the act of fixing them. He'd taken a few risks, had a few narrow squeaks, but never was seen actually performing the dirty deed. What followed the planting of the fifty-sixth sticker gave him most satisfaction.

A minor collision on the street caused abusive shouts between drivers and drew a mob of onlookers. Taking prompt advantage of the situation, Mowry slapped number fifty-six bang in the middle of a shop window while backed up against it by the crowd all of whom were looking the other way. He then wormed himself forward and got well into the mob before somebody noticed the window's adornment and attracted general attention to it. The audience turned around, Mowry with them, and gaped at the discovery.

The finder, a gaunt, middle-aged Sirian with pop eyes, pointed an incredulous finger and stuttered, "Just l-l-look at that! They must be m-mad in that shop. The Kaitempi will take them all to p-p-prison."

Mowry edged forward for a better look and read the sticker aloud. "'*Those who stand upon the platform and openly approve the war will stand upon the scaffold and weepingly regret it. Dirac Angestun Gesept.*'" He put on a frown. "The people in the shop can't be responsible for this—they wouldn't dare."

"S-somebody's dared," said Pop Eyes, quite reasonably.

"Yar." Mowry gave him the hard eye. "You saw it first. So maybe it was you, *hi*?"

"*Me*?" Pop Eyes went a very pale mauve, that being the nearest a Sirian could get to sheet-white. "*I* didn't put it there. You think I'm c-crazy?"

"Well, as you said, somebody did."

"It wasn't me," denied Pop Eyes, angry and agitated. "It must have been s-some crockpat."

"Crackpot," Mowry corrected.

"That's what I just s-said."

Another Sirian, younger and shrewder, chipped in with, "That's not a looney's work. There's more to it than that."

"Why?" demanded Pop Eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" A solitary nut would be more likely to scribble things. Silly ones, too." He nodded indicatively toward the subject of discussion. " That's a professional print job. It's also a plain, straightforward threat. Somebody risked his neck to plaster it up there but that didn't stop him. I'll bet there's an illegal organisation back of that stunt."

" It says so, doesn't it ?" interjected a voice. " The Sirian Freedom Party."

" Never heard of it," commented another.

" You've heard of it now," said Mowry.

" S-s-somebody ought to do s-something about it," declared Pop Eyes, waving his arms around.

S-s-somebody did, to wit, a cop. He muscled through the crowd, looked on the pavement for the body, bent down and felt around in case the victim happened to be invisible. Finding nothing, he straightened up, glowered at the audience and growled, " Now, what's all this ?"

Pop Eyes pointed again, this time with the proprietary air of one who has been granted a patent on the discovery. " S-see what it s-says on the window."

The cop looked and saw. Being able to read, he perused it twice while his face went several shades more purple. Then he returned attention to the crowd.

" Who did this ? "

Nobody knew.

" You've got eyes—don't you use them ?"

Apparently they didn't.

" Who saw this first ? "

" I did," said Pop Eyes proudly.

" But you didn't see anyone put it up ? "

" No."

The cop stuck out his jaw. " You sure of that ?"

" Yes, officer," admitted Pop Eyes, becoming nervous. " There was an accident in the s-street. We were all watching the two d-d-d-" He got himself into a vocal tangle and choked.

Waving him away, the cop addressed the crowd with considerable menace. " If anyone knows the identity of the culprit and refuses to reveal it, he will be deemed equally guilty and will suffer equally when caught."

Those in front backed off a yard or two, those in the rear suddenly discovered they had business elsewhere. A hard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

core of thirty of the incurably curious stayed put, Mowry among them.

Mowry said mildly, " Maybe they could tell you something in the shop."

The cop scowled. " I know my job, Shortass."

With that, he gave a loud snort, marched into the shop and bawled for the manager. In due course that worthy came out, examined his window with horror and swiftly acquired all the symptoms of a nervous wreck.

" We know nothing of this, officer. I assure you that it is no work of ours. It isn't *inside* the window, officer. It is outside, as you can see. Some passer-by must have done it. I cannot imagine why he should have picked on *this* window. Our patriotic devotion is unquestioned and—"

" Won't take the Kaitempi five seconds to question it," said the cop, cynically.

" But I myself am a reserve officer in the—"

" Shut up !" He jerked a heavy thumb toward the offending sticker. " Get it off."

" Yes, officer. Certainly, officer. I shall remove it immediately."

The manager started digging with his nails at the sticker's corners in attempt to peel it off. He didn't do so good because Terran technical superiority extended even to common adhesives. After several futile efforts he threw the cop an apologetic look, went inside, came out with a knife and tried again. This time he succeeded in tearing a small triangle from each corner, leaving the message intact.

" Get hot water and soak it off," commanded the cop, rapidly losing patience. He turned and shooed the audience. " Beat it. Go on, get moving."

The crowd mooched reluctantly away. Mowry glanced back from the far corner, saw the manager emerge with a steaming bucket and get busy swabbing the notice. He grinned to himself knowing that hot water was just the thing to release and activate the hydrofluouric base beneath the print.

Continuing on his way, Mowry disposed of two more stickers where they'd best be seen and cause the most annoyance. It would take twenty minutes for water to free number fifty-six and at the end of that time he couldn't resist returning to the scene. Going back on his tracks, he ambled past the shop.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sure enough the sticker had disappeared while in its place the same message was etched deeply and milkily in the glass. The cop and the manager were now arguing heatedly upon the sidewalk with half a dozen citizens gaping alternately at them and the window.

As Mowry loped past the cop bawled, " I don't care if the window *is* valued at two thousand guilders. You've got to board it up or replace the glass. One thing or the other and no half-measures."

" But, officer—"

" Do as you're told. To exhibit subversive propaganda is a major offence whether intentional or not. There's a war on ! "

Mowry wandered away, unnoticed, unsuspected, with eighteen stickers yet to be used before the day was through. By dusk he'd disposed of them all without mishap. He had also found himself a suitable hideaway.

III

At the hotel he stopped by the desk and spoke to the clerk. " This war, it makes things difficult. One can plan nothing with certainty." He made the hand-splaying gesture that was the Sirian equivalent of a shrug. " I must leave tomorrow and may be away seven days. It is a great nuisance."

" You wish to cancel your room, Mr. Agavan ? "

" No. I reserved it for ten days and will pay for ten." Dipping into his pocket he extracted a wad of guilders. " I shall then be able to claim it if I get back in time. If I don't, well, that'll be my hard luck."

" As you wish, Mr. Agavan." Indifferent to the throwing away of good money so long as it was somebody else's, the other scribbled a receipt, handed it over.

" Thanks," said Mowry. " Live long ! "

" May you live long." He gave the response in dead tones, not caring if the customer expired on the spot.

Mowry went to the restaurant and ate. Then to his room where he lay full length on the bed and gave his feet a much needed rest while he waited for darkness to become complete. When the last streamers of sunset had faded away he took another pack of stickers from his case, also a piece of crayon, and departed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The task was lots easier this time. Poor illumination helped cover his actions, he was now familiar with the locality and the places most deserving of his attentions, he was not diverted by the need to find another and safer address. For more than four hours he could concentrate single-mindedly upon the job of defacing walls and making a mess of the largest, most expensive sheets of plate glass that daytimes were prominently in public view.

Between seven-thirty and midnight he slapped exactly one hundred stickers on shops, offices and vehicles of the city transport system, also inscribed swiftly, clearly and in large size the letters D.A.G. upon twenty-four walls.

The latter feat was performed with Terran crayon, a deceitfully chalk-like substance that made full use of the porosity of brick when water was applied. In other words, the more furiously it was washed the more stubbornly it became embedded. There was only one sure way of obliterating the offensive letters—to knock down the entire wall and rebuild it.

In the morning he breakfasted, walked out with his case, ignored a line of waiting dynocars and caught a bus. He changed buses nine times, switching routes one way or the other and heading nowhere in particular. Five times he travelled without his case which reposed awhile in a rented locker. This tedious rigmarole may not have been necessary but there was no way of telling ; it was his duty not only to avoid actual perils but also to anticipate hypothetical ones.

Such as this : " Kaitempi check. Let me see the hotel register. H'm !—much the same as last time. Except for this Shir Agavan. Who is he, *hi* ?"

" A forestry surveyor."

" Did you get that from his identity card ?"

" Yes, officer. It was quite in order."

" By whom is he employed ?"

" By the Ministry of Natural Resources."

" Was his card embossed with the Ministry's stamp ?"

" I don't remember. Maybe it was. I can't say for sure."

" You should notice things like that. You know full well that you'll be asked about them when the check is made."

" Sorry, officer, but I can't see and remember every item that comes my way in a week."

" You could try harder. Oh, well, I suppose this Agavan character is all right. But maybe I'd better get confirmation if only to show I'm on the job. Give me your phone." A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

call, a few questions, the phone slammed down, then in harsh tones, " The Ministry has no Sir Agavan upon its roll. The fellow is using a fake identity-card. When did he leave the hotel ? Did he look agitated when he went ? Did he say anything to indicate where he was going ? Wake up, you fool, and answer ! Give me the key to his room—it must be searched at once. Did he take a dynocar when he departed ? Describe him to me as fully as you can. So he was carrying a case ? What sort of a case, *hi* ?"

That was the kind of chance that must be taken when one holes up in known and regularly checked haunts. The risk was not enormous, in fact it was small—but it was still there. And when tried, sentenced and waiting for death it is no consolation to know that what came off was a hundred to one chance. To keep going and to maintain the one-man battle the enemy had to be outwitted, if possible, all along the line and all the time.

Satisfied that by now the most persistent of snoops could not follow his tortuous trail through the city, Mowry retrieved his case, lugged it up to the third floor of a crummy tenement building, let himself into his suite of two sour-smelling rooms. The rest of the day he spent cleaning the place up and making it fit to live in.

He'd be lots harder to trace here. The shifty-eyed landlord had not asked to see his identity-card, had accepted him without question as Gast Hurkin, a low-grade railroad official, honest, hard-working and stupid enough to pay his rent regularly and on time. To the landlord's way of thinking the unsavoury neighbours rated a higher I.Q.—in terms of that environment—being able to get a crust with less effort and remaining tight-mouthed about how they did it.

Housework finished, Mowry bought a paper, sought through it from front to back for some mention of yesterday's activities. There wasn't a word on the subject. At first he felt disappointed, then on further reflection he became heartened.

Opposition to the war and open defiance of the government definitely made news that justified a front-page spread. No reporter, no editor would pass it up if he could help it. Therefore the papers had passed it up because they could not help it. They'd had no choice about the matter. Somebody high in authority had clamped down upon them with the heavy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand of censorship. Somebody with considerable power had been driven into making a weak countermove.

That was a start, anyway. His first waspish buzzings had forced authority to interfere with the press. What's more, the countermove was feeble and ineffective. It wouldn't work. It was doomed to failure, serving only as a stopgap while they sat around and beat their brains for more decisive measures.

The more persistently a government maintains silence on a given subject of discussion, the more the public talks about it, thinks about it. The longer and more stubborn the silence the guiltier it looks to the talkers and thinkers. In time of war the most morale-lowering question that can be asked is, "What are they hiding from us *now*?"

Some hundreds of citizens would be asking themselves that same question tomorrow, the next day or the next week. The potent words *Dirac Angestun Gesept* would be on a multitude of lips, milling around in a like number of minds, merely because the powers-that-be were afraid to talk.

And if a government fears to admit even the pettiest facts of war, how much faith can the common man place in the leadership's claim not to be afraid of anything? *Hi*?

A disease gains in menace when it spreads, popping up in places far apart and taking on the characteristics of an epidemic. For that reason Mowry's first outing from his new abode was to Radine, a town two-forty miles south of Pertane. Population three hundred thousand, hydro-electric power, bauxite mines, aluminium extraction plants.

He caught an early morning train. It was overcrowded with all those people compelled to move around by the various needs of war: sullen workers, bored soldiers, self-satisfied officials, colourless nonentities. The seat facing him was occupied by a heavy-bellied character with bloated, porcine features, a caricaturist's idea of the Jaimec Minister of Food.

The train set off, hit up a fast clip. People piled in and out at intermediate stations. Pigface contemptuously ignored Mowry, watched the passing landscape with lordly disdain, finally fell asleep and let his mouth hang open. He was twice as hoglike in his slumbers and would have attained near-perfection with a lemon between his teeth.

Thirty miles from Radine the door from the coach ahead slammed open, a civilian policeman entered. He was accom-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

panied by two burly, hard-faced characters in plain clothes. This trio halted by the nearest passenger.

"Your ticket," demanded the cop.

The passenger handed it over, his expression scared. The policeman examined it front and back, passed it to his companions who studied it in turn.

"Your identity-card."

That got the same treatment, the cop looking it over as if doing a routine chore, the other two surveying it more critically and with unconcealed suspicion.

"Your movement permit."

It passed the triple scrutiny, was given back along with the ticket and identity-card. The recipient's face showed vast relief. The cop picked on the passenger sitting next to him.

"Your ticket."

There were ten more to be chivvied before these inquisitors reached Mowry. He was willing to take a chance on his documents passing muster but he dared not risk a search. The cop was just a plain, ordinary cop. The other two were members of the all-powerful Kaitempi; if *they* dipped into his pockets the balloon would go up once and for all.

By now most of the passengers were directing their full attention along the aisle, watching what was going on and meanwhile trying to ooze an aura of patriotic rectitude. Mowry slid a surreptitious look at Pigface who was still lolling opposite with head hanging on chest and mouth wide open. Were those sunken little eyes really closed or were they watching him between narrowed lids?

Short of pushing his face right up against the other's unpleasant countenance he couldn't tell for certain. But it made no difference, the trio were edging nearer every moment and he had to take a risk. Furtively he felt behind him, found a tight but deep gap in the upholstery where the bottom of the back-rest met the rear of the seat. Keeping his attention riveted upon Pigface, he edged a pack of stickers and two crayons out of his pocket, crammed them into the gap, poking them well out of sight. The sleeper opposite did not stir or blink an eyelid.

Two minutes later the cop gave Pigface an irritable shove on the shoulder and that worthy woke up with a snort. He glared at the cop, then at the pair in plain clothes.

"So! What is this?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your ticket," said the cop.

"A traffic check, *hi*?" responded Pigface, showing sudden understanding. "Oh, well—" Inserting fat fingers in a vest pocket he took out an ornate card embedded in a slice of transparent plastic. This he exhibited to the trio as if it were the equivalent of the keys to the kingdom. The cop stared at it and became servile. The two toughies stiffened like raw recruits caught dozing on parade.

"Your pardon, Major," apologised the cop.

"It is granted," assured Pigface, showing a well-practiced mixture of arrogance and condescension. "You are only doing your duty." He favoured the rest of the coach with a beam of triumph born of petty power, openly enjoying the situation and advertising himself as being several grades above the common herd.

Leery and embarrassed, the cop switched to Mowry, said, "Ticket."

Mowry handed it over, striving to look innocent and bored. Pseudo-nonchalance didn't come easy because now he was the focal point of the coach's battery of eyes. Almost all the other passengers were looking his way, Pigface was surveying him speculatively and the two Kaitempi agents were giving him the granite-hard stare.

"Identity-card."

That got passed across.

"Movement permit."

He surrendered it, braced himself for the half-expected command of, "Stand up!"

It did not come. Anxious to get away from the fat Major's cold, official gaze, the three examined the papers, handed them back without comment and moved on. Mowry shoved the documents into his pockets, tried to keep a great relief out of his voice as he spoke to the other.

"I wonder what they're after."

"It is no business of yours," said Pigface, as insultingly as possible.

"No, of course not," agreed Mowry.

There was silence between them. Pigface sat mooning through the window and showed no inclination to resume his slumbers. Damn the fellow, thought Mowry, retrieving the hidden stickers was going to prove difficult with that slob awake and alert.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A door crashed shut as the cop and Kaitempi agents finished with that coach and went through to the following one. A minute later the train pulled up with such suddenness that a couple of passengers were thrown from their seats. Outside the train and farther back toward the rear end voices started shouting.

Heaving himself to his feet, Pigface opened the window's top half, stuck his head out and looked back toward the source of the noise. Then with speed surprising in one so cumbersome he whipped a gun from his pocket, ran along the aisle and through the end door. Outside the bawling grew louder.

Mowry got up and had a look through the window. Near the tail of the train a small bunch of figures were running alongside the track, the cop and the Kaitempi slightly in the lead. As he watched, the latter swung up their right arms and several sharp cracks rang through the morning air. It was impossible to see at whom they were shooting.

Also beside the train, gun in hand, Pigface was pounding heavily along in pursuit of the pursuers. Curious faces popped out of windows all along the line of coaches. Mowry called to the nearest face.

" What happened ? "

" Those three came in to check papers. Some fellow saw them, made a wild dash to the opposite door and jumped out. They stopped the train and went after him."

" Was he hurt when he jumped ? "

" Not by the looks of it. Last I saw of him he was diminishing in the distance like a champion *meika*. He got a pretty good start. They'll be lucky to catch him."

" Who was he, anyway ? "

" No idea. Some wanted criminal, I suppose."

" Well," offered Mowry, " if the Kaitempi came after me I'd hotfoot it like a scared Spakum."

" Who wouldn't ?" said the other.

Withdrawing, Mowry took his seat. All the other travellers were at the windows, their full attention directed outside. This was the opportune moment. He dug a hand into the hiding-place, extracted the stickers and crayons, pocketed them.

The train stayed put for half an hour during which there was no more excitement within hearing. Finally it jerked into motion and at the same time Pigface reappeared and dumped himself into his seat. His face was thunderous. He looked sour enough to pickle his own hams.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Did you catch him?" asked Mowry, lending his manner all the politeness and respect he could muster.

Pigface bestowed a dirty look. "It is no business of yours."

"No, of course not," confirmed Mowry for the second time.

The previous silence came back and remained until the train pulled into Radine. This being the terminus, everybody got out. Mowry padded along with the mob through the station exit but did not make a beeline for punishable windows and walls.

Instead he followed Pigface.

Shadowing presented no great difficulty. Pigface behaved as though the likelihood of being trailed would be the last thing ever to enter his mind. He went his way with the arrogant assurance of one who has the law in his pocket, all ordinary persons being less than the dust beneath his chariot wheel. In this respect his strength was his weakness, a fatal weakness as he had yet to discover.

Immediately outside the station's arched entrance Pigface turned right, plodded a hundred yards along the approach-road to the car-park at the farther end. Here he stopped by a long, green dynocar, felt in his pocket for keys.

Lingering in the shadow of a projecting buttress, Mowry watched the quarry unlock the door and squeeze inside. He hustled across the road to a taxi-stand, climbed into the leading vehicle. The move was perfectly timed; he sank into the seat just as the green dynocar whined past.

"Where to?" asked the taxi-driver.

"Can't tell you exactly," said Mowry, evasively. "I've been here only once before and that was years ago. But I know the way. Just follow my instructions."

The taxi's dynamo set up a rising hum as the machine sped down the road while its passenger kept attention on the car ahead and gave curt orders from time to time. It would have been lots easier, he knew, to have pointed and said, "Follow that green car." But that would have linked him in the driver's mind with Pigface or at least with Pigface's green dyno. The Kaitempi were experts at ferreting out such links and following them to the bitter end. As it was, the taxi-driver had no idea that he was shadowing anyone.

Swiftly the chaser and the chased threaded their way through the centre of Radine until eventually the leader made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a sharp turn to the left and rolled down a ramp into the basement of a large apartment building. Mowry let the taxi run a couple of hundred yards farther on before he called a halt.

"This will do me." He got out, felt for money. "Nice to have a good, dependable memory, isn't it?"

"Yar," said the driver. "One guilder six-tenths."

Mowry gave him two guilders, watched him cruise away. He paced along the street until he found a phone booth. From it he called the apartment building, got its switchboard operator.

"I was supposed to meet somebody in your foyer nearly an hour ago," he explained. "I can't make it. If he's still waiting I'd like him to be told I can't get along."

"Who is he?" asked the operator. "A resident?"

"Yes—but I've clean forgotten his name. Nobody is more stupid than me about names. He is plump, got heavy features. Major . . . major . . . what a *soko* of a memory I've got!"

"That would be Major Sallana," the operator said.

"Correct," agreed Mowry. "Major Sallana—I had it at the back of my mind all the time."

"Hold on. I'll see if he's still waiting." There followed a minute's silence before the operator returned with, "No, he isn't. I've just called his apartment on seventh and there's no reply. Do you wish to leave a message for him?"

"It won't be necessary—he must have given me up. It's not of great importance, anyway. Live long!"

"Live long!" said the operator.

So there was no reply from the apartment. Looked as if Pigface had gone straight in and straight out again. Unless he was lying in his bath and not inclined to answer the phone. That didn't seem likely; he'd hardly had time to fill a tub, undress and get into it. If he really was absent from his rooms it meant that opportunity had presented itself so far as Mowry was concerned and it was up to him to grab it while it was there.

Despite an inward sense of urgency, Mowry paused long enough to cope with other work. He looked through the booth's glass, found himself unobserved. Then he slapped a sticker on the facing window exactly where tireless talkers could contemplate it while holding the phone.

It said: *Power lovers started this war. Dirac Angestun Gesept will end it—and them!*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Going to the apartments he strolled with deceitful confidence across the foyer, stepped into an open lift, took it to the seventh floor. He trod silently along the carpet of the corridor, looking at doors until he found one bearing the name he sought.

He knocked.

No answer.

He knocked again, a fraction louder but not loud enough to arouse others nearby.

Silence answered him.

This was where his hectic schooling came in. Taking from his pocket a bunch of keys that looked quite ordinary but weren't, he set to work on the lock, had the door open within precisely thirty-five seconds. Speed was essential for that task—if anyone had chosen that time to enter the corridor he'd have been caught redhanded. Nobody did appear. He slipped through the door, carefully closed it behind him.

His first act was to make swift survey of the rooms and assure himself that nobody was lying around asleep or drunk. There were four rooms, all vacant. Definitely Major Pigface Sallana was not at home.

Returning to the first room, Mowry gave it a sharp examination, spotted a gun lying atop a small filing cabinet. He checked it, found it loaded, stuck it in his pocket.

Next, with expert technique he cracked open a big, heavy desk and started raking through its drawers. The way he did it had the sure, superfast touch of the professional criminal but was in fact a tribute to his college training.

The contents of the fourth drawer on the left made his hair stand on end. He had been seeking with the intention of confiscating whatever it was that made cops servile and even persuaded Kaitempi agents to stand to attention. Jerking open the drawer, he found himself gazing at a neat stack of writing paper bearing official print across its head.

This was more than he'd expected, more than he had hoped for in his most optimistic moments. To his mind it proved that despite his college lectures about caution, caution, everlasting caution, it pays to play hunches and take chances. What the paper's caption said was :

DIRAC KAIMINA TEMPITI:
Leshun Radine.

In other words : the Sirian Secret Police—District of Radine. No wonder those thugs on the train had made ready to grovel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pigface was a Kaitempi brasshat and as such outranked an army brigadier or even a space navy fleet leader.

This discovery upped the speed of his activity still further. From the pile of luggage in the back room he seized a small case, forced it open, tossed the clothing it contained onto the floor. He dumped all the Kaitempi writing paper into the case. A little later he found a small embossing machine, tested it, found that it impressed the letter DKT surmounted by a winged sword. That also went into the case.

Finishing with the desk he started on the adjacent filing cabinet, his nostrils switching with excitement as he worked at its top drawer. A faint sound came to his ears, he stopped, taut and listening. It was the scrape of a key in the door-lock. The key failed to turn at the first attempt, tried again.

Mowry jumped toward the wall, flattened himself against it where he'd be concealed by the opening door. The key grated a second time, the lock responded, the door swung across his field of vision as Pigface lumbered in.

Pigface took four paces into the room before his brain accepted what his eyes could see. He came to a full stop, stared incredulously and with mounting fury at the ransacked desk while behind him the door drifted around and clicked shut. Reaching a decision, he turned to go out and then saw the invader.

"Good evening," greeted Mowry, flat-voiced.

"*You*?" Pigface glowered at him with outraged authority. "What are you doing here? What is the meaning of this?"

"I'm here as a common thief. The meaning is that you've been robbed."

"Then let me tell you—"

"When robbery is done," Mowry went on, "somebody has to be the victim. This time it's your turn. No reason why you should have all the luck all the time, is there?"

Pigface took a step forward.

"Sit down!" ordered Mowry, in sharp tones.

The other stopped but did not sit. He stood firm upon the carpet, his small, crafty eyes taking on a stubborn glint, his complexion dark. He spoke in a manner suggesting that at any moment he might go bang.

"Put down that gun."

"Who?—me?" said Mowry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't know what you're doing," declared Pigface, conditioned by a lifetime of creating fear. "Because you don't know who I am. But when you do you'll wish—"

"As it happens, I do know who you are," Mowry chipped in. "You're one of the Kaitempi's fat rats. A professional torturer, a paid strangler, a conscienceless *soko* who maims and kills for money and for the sadistic pleasure of it. Sit down when I tell you."

Still Pigface refused to sit. On the contrary, he refuted the popular belief that all bullies are cowards. Like many of his ilk he had brute courage. His eyes flared with hate, he took a heavy but swift step to one side while his hand dived into a pocket.

The step had hardly been taken, the hand only just reached the pocket, when Mowry's gun went *br-r-r-up* ! not loudly but effectively. For five or six seconds Pigface stood wearing a stupid expression, then he teetered, fell backward with a thud that shook the room, rolled onto his side.

Gently opening the door a few inches, Mowry gazed into the corridor, remained listening awhile. There came no rush of feet toward the apartment, nobody raced away yelling for help. If anyone had heard the muffled burst of shots they must have attributed the noise to the flow of traffic far below.

Satisfied that the alarm had not been raised, he shut the door, bent over the body, had a close look at it. Pigface was as dead as he could be, the brief spray from the machine pistol having put seven slugs through his obese frame.

He searched the body and got what he had coveted from the moment that Pigface had basked in adulation upon the train. The ornate card set in thin plastic. It bore signs, seals and signatures, certified that the bearer held the rank of major in the Secret Police. Better still, it did not give the bearer's name and personal description, contenting itself with using a code-number in lieu. The Secret Police, it seemed, could be warily secret even between themselves, a habit of which others could take full advantage.

Mowry now returned attention to the filing cabinet. Most of the stuff within it proved to be worthless, revealing nothing not already known to Terran Intelligence. But there were three files containing case-histories of persons who had also been made to conform to the Kaitempi habit of hiding identities under code-numbers. Evidently Pigface had abstracted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them from local headquarters and taken them home to study at leisure.

He scanned these papers rapidly. It soon became clear that the three unknowns had earned the enmity of the government by nursing political ambitions. They were potential rivals of those already in power. The case-histories said nothing to indicate whether they were now living or dead. The implication was that they were still alive, with their fate yet to be decided, otherwise it seemed hardly likely that Pigface would waste time on such documents. Anyway, the disappearance of these vital papers would aggravate the powers-that-be and possibly scare a few of them.

So he put the files in the case along with the rest of the loot. After that he made a swift hunt around for anything previously overlooked, searched spare suits in the bedroom, discovered nothing more worth taking. The last chore was to remove from the apartment all clues capable of linking him with the existing situation.

With the case in one hand and the gun in his pocket, he paused in the doorway, looked back at the body.

"Live long!"

Pigface did not deign to reply. He reposed in silence, his podgy right hand clasping a paper on which was inscribed: *Executed by Dirac Angestun Gesept.*

Whoever found the body would be sure to pass that message on. It would be equally certain to go from hand to hand, up the ascending scale of rank, right to the top brackets. With any luck at all it would give a few of them the galloping gripes.

IV

Luck held. Mowry did not have to wait long for a train to Pertane. He was more than glad of this because the bored station police tended to become inquisitive about travellers who sat around too long. True, if accosted he could show his documents or, strictly as a last resort, arrogantly use the stolen Kaitempi card to browbeat his way out of a possible trap. But it was better and safer not to become an object of attention in this place at this time.

The train came in and he managed to get aboard without having been noticed by one of several restlessly roaming cops. After a short time it pulled out again, rumbled into pitch darkness. The lateness of the hour meant that passengers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were few and the coach he had chosen had plenty of vacant seats. It was easy to select a place where he'd not be pestered by a garrulous neighbour or studied for the full length of the journey by someone with sharp eyes and a long memory. He lolled back, tired and heavy-eyed, and hoped to heaven that if there should be another police check en route his papers, or the Kaitempi card, or his gun would get him out of a jam.

One thing was certain : if Pigface's body were found within the next three or four hours the resulting hullabaloo would spread fast enough and far enough to ensure a thorough end-to-end search of the train. The searchers would have no suspect's description to go upon but they'd take a look into all luggage and recognise stolen property when they found it. Anyone of relatively low brain-power would have the sense to grab the owner of said luggage and disregard all protestations of innocence.

He dozed uneasily to the hypnotic thrum-tiddy-thrum of the train. Every time a door slammed or a window rattled he awoke, nerves stretched, body tense. A couple of times he wondered whether a top priority radio-call was beating the train to its destination.

" Halt and search all passengers and luggage on the 11.20 from Radine."

There was no check on the way. The train slowed, clanked through the points and switches of a large grid system, rolled into Pertane. Its passengers dismounted, all of them sleepy and a few looking half-dead as they straggled untidily toward the exit. Mowry timed himself to be in the rear of the bunch, lagging behind with half a dozen bandy-legged moochers. His full attention was directed straight ahead, watching for evidence of a grim-faced bunch waiting at the barrier.

He was sweaty with reaction when he found his fears were not confirmed. It had been his first murder and it *was* a murder because they would define it as such. So he'd been paying for it in his own imagination, fancying himself hunted before the hunt was up. Beyond the barrier lounged two station police eyeing the emerging stream with total lack of interest and yawning from time to time. He went past practically under their noses and they could not have cared less about him.

But he wasn't yet out of the bag. Police on the station expected to see people carrying luggage any time of day or night. Cops in the city streets were different, being more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inclined to question the reason at such an indecent hour. They were nasty-minded about burdened walkers in the night.

That problem could be solved by the easy expedient of taking a taxi—only to create another problem. Taxis have to be driven. Drivers have mouths and memories. The most taciturn of them could become positively gabby when questioned by the Kaitempi.

"You take anyone off the 11.20 from Radine?"

"Yar. Young fellow with a case."

"Notice anything suspicious about him? He act tough or behave warily, for instance?"

"Not that I noticed. Seemed all right to me. Wasn't a native Jaimecan though. Spoke with a real Mashambi growl."

"Remember where you took him, *hi*?"

"Yar, I do. I can show you."

There was an escape from this predicament; he took it by dumping the case in a rented locker on the station and walking away free of the betraying burden. In theory the case should be safe enough for one full Jaimecan day. In ominous fact there was a slight chance of it being discovered and used as bait.

On a world where nothing was sacrosanct from their prying fingers the Kaitempi had master-keys to everything. They weren't above opening and searching every bank of lockers within a thousand miles of the scene of the crime if by any quirk of thought they took it into their heads that to do so would be a smart move. So when he returned in daytime to collect the case he'd have to approach the lockers with considerable caution, making sure that a watch was not being kept upon them by a ring of hard characters.

Pacing rapidly home, he was within half a mile of his destination when two cops stepped from a dark doorway the other side of the street.

"Hey, you!"

Mowry stopped. They came across, stared at him in grim silence. Then one made a gesture to indicate the high-shining stars, the deserted street.

"Wandering around pretty late, aren't you?"

"Nothing wrong with that, is there?" he answered, making his tone slightly apologetic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" *We* are asking the questions," retorted the cop. "Where've you been to this hour ?"

" On a train."

" From where ? "

" Khamasta."

" And where're you going now ?"

" Home."

" You'd have made it quicker in a taxi, wouldn't you ?"

" Sure would," Mowry agreed. " Unfortunately I happened to be last out. Someone always has to be last out. By that time every taxi had been grabbed."

" Well, it's a story."

At this point the other cop chipped in. He adopted Technique Number Seven, namely, a narrowing of the eyes, an out-thrusting of the jaw and a harshening of the voice. Once in a while Number Seven would be rewarded with a guilty look or at least a hopelessly exaggerated expression of innocence. He was very good at it, having practiced it assiduously upon his wife and the bedroom mirror.

" You wouldn't perhaps have been nowhere near Khamasta, *hi* ? You wouldn't perhaps have been spending the night taking a nice, easy stroll around Pertane and sort of absent-mindedly messing around with walls and windows, would you ?"

" No, I wouldn't," said Mowry. " For the reason that nobody would pay me a bad guilder for my trouble. Do I look crazy ?"

" Not enough to be noticed," admitted the cop. " But somebody's doing it, crazy or not."

" Well, I can't blame you fellows for wanting to nab him. I don't like loonies myself. They give me the creeps." He made an impatient gesture. " If you're going to search me how about getting the job done ? I've had a long day, I'm dog-tired and I want to get home."

" I don't think we'll bother," said the cop. " You show us your identity-card."

Mowry dug it out. The cop gave it no more than a perfunctory glance while his companion ignored it altogether.

" All right, on your way. If you insist on walking the streets at this hour you must expect to be stopped and questioned. There's a war on, see ?"

" Yes, officer," said Mowry, meekly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He pushed off at his best pace, thanking heaven he had got rid of his luggage. If he'd been holding that case they'd have regarded it, rightly enough, as probable evidence of evil-doing. To prevent them from opening it and inspecting the contents he'd have had to subdue them with the Kaitempi card. He didn't want to make use of that tactic if he could help it until sometime after Pigface's killing had been discovered and the resulting uproar had died down. Say in at least one month's time.

Reaching his apartment, he undressed but did not go immediately to sleep. He lay in bed and examined the precious card again and again. Now that he had more time to ponder its full significance and obvious potentialities he found himself torn two ways—should he keep it or not?

The socio-political system of the Sirian Empire being what it was, a Kaitempi card was the prime scare-device on any Sirian-held planet. The mere sight of this dreaded totem was enough to make ninety-nine percent of civilians get down on their knees and salaam, their faces in the dust. That fact made a Kaitempi card of tremendous value to any wasp. Yet Terra had not provided him with such a weapon. He'd had to grab it for himself. The obvious conclusion was that Terran Intelligence lacked an original copy.

Out there amid the mist of stars, on the green-blue world called Earth they could duplicate anything save a living entity —and could produce a very close imitation even of that. Maybe they needed this card. Given the chance, maybe they'd arm every wasp in existence with a mock-majorship in the Kaitempi and by the same token give life to some otherwise doomed to death.

For himself, to surrender the card to Terran authority would be like voluntarily sacrificing his queen while playing a hard-fought and bitter game of chess. All the same, before going to sleep he reached his conclusion : on his first return to the cave he would beam a detailed report of what had happened, the prize he had won and what it was worth. Terra could then decide whether or not to deprive him of it in the interest of the greater number.

The wasp buzzed alone, unaided, but was loyal to the swarm.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At noon he made cautious return to the station, hung around for twenty minutes as if waiting to meet an incoming traveller. He kept sharp, careful watch in all directions while appearing bored and interested in nothing save occasional streams of arrivals. Some fifty or sixty other people were idling about in unconscious imitation of himself; among them he could detect nobody maintaining a sly eye upon the lockers. There were about a dozen who looked overmuscled and wore the deadpan hardness of officials but these were solely interested in people coming through the barriers.

Finally he took the chance, ambled casually up to his locker, stuck his key in its door while wishing to God that he had a third eye located in the back of his neck. Opening the door, he took out the case and had a bad moment as he stood with the damning evidence in his hand. If ever it was going to occur, now was the time for a shout of triumph, a sudden grip on his shoulder, a bunch of callous faces all around.

Still nothing happened. He strolled away looking blandly innocent but deep inside as leery as a fox who hears the dim, distant baying of the hounds. Outside the station he jumped a crosstown bus, maintained a wary watch for followers.

Chances were very high that nobody had noticed him, nobody was interested in him, because in Radine the Kaitempi were still running around in circles without the vaguest notion of where to probe first. But he could not take that for granted nor dare he underestimate their craftiness. There was one chance in a thousand that by some item he'd overlooked or hadn't thought of he'd given them a lead straight to the lockers and that they had decided not to nab him on the spot, hoping that if left to run loose he'd take them to the rest of the presumed mob.

So during the ride he peered repeatedly backward, observed passengers getting on and off, tried to see if he could spot a loaded dynocar tagging along somewhere behind. He changed buses five times, lugged the case along two squalid alleys, walked into the fronts and out the backs of three department stores.

Satisfied at last that there was no surreptitious pursuit he made for his apartment, kicked the case under the bed, let go a deep sigh. They'd warned him that this kind of life would prove a continual strain on the nerves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Going out again, he bought a box of envelopes and a cheap typewriter. Then using the Kaitempi paper he spent the rest of the day and part of the next one typing with forceful brevity. He didn't have to bother about leaving his prints all over his correspondence ; Terran fingerprint treatment had turned his impressions into vague, unclassifiable blotches.

When he had finished that task he devoted the following day to patient research in the city library. He made copious notes, went home, addressed a stack of envelopes, stamped the lot.

In the early evening he mailed more than two hundred letters to newspaper editors, radio announcers, military leaders, senior civil servants, police chiefs, prominent politicians and key-members of the government. Defiantly positioned under the Kaitempi heading and supported by the embossed seal of its winged sword, the message was short but said plenty.

Sallana is the first. There are plenty more to come. The list is long.

Dirac Angestun Gesept.

That done, he burned the envelope-box and dropped the typewriter in the river where it ran deep. If he had occasion to write any more letters he'd buy another one and afterward get rid of it the same way. He could well afford to buy and scrap a hundred typewriters if he thought it necessary. The more the merrier. If the Kaitempi analysed the type on threatening correspondence and found a number of untraceable machines being used, they'd get the idea that a gigantic organisation was at work. Furthermore, every purchase helped inflate the Jaimecan economy with worthless paper.

His next step was to visit a drive-yourself agency and rent a dynocar for a week, using the name of Shir Agavan and the address of the hotel where first he'd holed-up. By its means he got rid of five hundred stickers distributed over six small towns and thirty villages.

He had been on Jaimec exactly four weeks when he disposed of the last of the stickers from his bag and thus reached the end of phase one. It was at this point he began to feel despondent.

In the papers and over the air officialdom still maintained complete silence about traitorous activities. Not a word had been said about the slaughter of Pigface Sallana. All the out-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ward evidence suggested that the government remained blissfully unaware of waspish buzzings and was totally unconcerned about the existence of an imaginary *Dirac Angestun Gesept.*

Thus deprived of visible reactions Mowry had no way of telling what results he had achieved, if any. In retrospect this paper-war looked pretty futile in spite of all Wolf's glib talk about pinning down an army with little more than gestures. He, Mowry, had been lashing out in the dark and the other fellow wasn't even bothering to hit back.

That made it difficult to maintain enthusiasm at the first feverish pitch. Just one public squeal of pain from the opposition or a howl of fury or a tirade of threats would have given him a big boost by showing him that at last he had landed a real wallop on something solid. But they wouldn't give him the petty satisfaction of hearing them breathing hard.

He was paying the psychological penalty of working alone. There was no companion-in-arms with whom to share stimulating speculations about the enemy's hidden countermoves. Nobody to encourage or from whom to receive encouragement. Nobody sharing the conspiracy and the danger and—as is usual among two or more—the laughs. In his waspish role he was thrown wholly upon his own moral resources which needed feeding with factual evidence that so far had not been forthcoming.

Swiftly he built up a blue spell so dismal and depressing that for two days he hung around the apartment and did nothing but mope. On the third day pessimism evaporated and was replaced with a growing sense of alarm. He did not ignore the new feeling. At training college they'd warned him times without number always to heed it.

" The fact that one is hunted in deadly earnest can cause an abnormal sharpening of the mental perceptions almost to the point of developing a sixth sense. That's what makes hardened criminals difficult to catch. They get hunches and play them. Many a badly wanted crook has moved out one jump ahead of the police with such timeliness that they've suspected a tip-off. All that had really happened was that the fellow suddenly got the jitters and took off good and fast. For the sake of your skin you do the same. If ever you feel they're getting close don't hang around and try check on it—just beat it someplace else !"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes, that's what they'd said to him. He remembered now that he had wondered whether this ability to smell danger might be quasi-telepathic. The police rarely pulled a raid without a stakeout or some sort of preliminary observation. A hound hanging around a hole, sharp-eyed, sharp-toothed and unable to avoid thinking of what he was doing, might give the one in hiding his mental scent that would register not in clear thought-forms but rather as the inward shrilling of an alarm-bell.

On the strength of that he grabbed his bags and bolted out the back way. Nobody was loafing around at that moment nobody saw him go, nobody tracked him as he went.

Four beefy characters stationed themselves within watching and shooting distance of the back a little before midnight. Two carloads of similar specimens drew up at the front, bashed open the door, charged upstairs. They were there three hours and half-killed the landlord before they became convinced of his ignorance:

Mowry knew nothing of this. It was the much-needed boost he was lucky to miss.

His new sanctuary a mile and a half distant was one long, narrow room at the top of a dilapidated building in Pertane's toughest quarter, a district where slatterns kept house by kicking the dirt around until it got lost. Here he'd not been asked for any name or identity-card, it being one of the more delightful customs of the country to mind one's own goddam business. All that proved necessary was to exhibit a fifty guilder note. The money had been snatched, a cheap and well-worn key given in exchange.

Promptly he made the key useless by buying a cruciform multiward lock and fitting it to the door. He also fixed a couple of recessed bolts to the window despite that it was forty feet above ground and well-nigh unreachable. Finally he built a small hidden trap in the roof, this being his intended escape route if ever the stairs became solidly blocked with enemy carcases.

By now he'd recovered from both his depression and his sense of impending disaster. In better spirits he went outdoors, walked along the road until he reached a vacant lot littered with junk. When nobody was looking he dropped Pigface's gun on the lot at a point near the sidewalk where it could easily be seen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ambling onward with hands in pockets, his gait a bow-legged slouch, he reached a doorway, lounged in it and assumed the look of bored cunning of one who sows not neither doth he reap. This was the fashionable expression in that area. Mostly his gaze was aimed across the street but all the time he was keeping surreptitious watch upon the gun lying seventy yards away.

What followed proved yet again that not one person in ten uses his eyes. Within short time thirty people had passed close by the gun without seeing it. Six of these walked within a few inches of it, one actually stepped over it.

Twenty more pedestrians passed. Of these, two noticed the gun and pretended they'd not seen it. Neither came back to claim it when nobody was near. Probably they viewed the weapon as dangerous evidence that someone had seen fit to dump—and they weren't going to be chumps enough to be caught with it. The one who eventually confiscated it was an artist in his own right.

This character, a heavily built individual with hanging jowls and a rolling gait, went by the gun and noted its existence without batting an eyelid or changing pace. Continuing onward, he stopped at the next corner fifty yards away, looked around with the air of a stranger uncertain of his whereabouts, dug a notebook from his pocket and put on a great play of consulting it. All the time his sharp little eyes were darting this way and that but failed to find the watcher in the doorway.

After a while he retraced his steps, crossed the vacant lot, dropped the notebook on top of the gun, scooped up both in one swift snatch and ambled casually onward. The way the book remained prominently in his hand while the gun disappeared was a wonder to behold.

Letting the fellow get a good lead, Mowry emerged from the doorway and followed. He hoped the other had only a short way to go. This, obviously, was a smart customer likely to notice and throw off a shadower if chased too long. He didn't want to lose him after the trouble he'd taken to find a willing gun-grabber.

Floppy Jowls continued along the road, turned right into a narrower and dirtier street, headed over a crossroad, turned left. At no time did he behave suspiciously, take evasive tactics or show any awareness of being followed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Near the end of the street he entered a cheap restaurant with dusty windows and a cracked, unreadable sign above its door. A few moments later Mowry mooched past, gave the place a swift once-over. It had an ominous look about it, a typical rat-hole where underworld characters took refuge from the sunshine while they waited for the night. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. Boldly he shoved open the door and walked in.

The place stank of unwashed bodies, stale food and drippings of *zith*. Behind the bar a sallow-faced attendant eyed him with the hostile expression reserved for any and every unfamiliar face. A dozen customers sat in the half-light by the stained and paintless wall and glowered at him on general principles. They looked a choice bunch of apaches.

Mowry leaned on the bar and spoke to Sallow Face, making his tones sound tough. "I'll have a mug of coffee."

"*Coffee*?" The other jumped as if rammed with a needle. "Blood of Jaime, that's a *Spakum* drink."

"Yar," said Mowry. "I want to spit it all over the floor." He let go a harsh, grating laugh. "Wake up and give me a *zith*."

The attendant scowled, snatched a none too clean glassite mug from a shelf, pumped it full of low-grade *zith* and slid it across. "Six-tenths."

Paying him, Mowry took the drink across to a small table in the darkest corner, a dozen pairs of eyes following his every move. He sat down, looked idly around and ignored the grim silence. His manner was that of one thoroughly at home when slumming. His questing gaze found Floppy Jowls just as that worthy left his seat, came across mug in hand and joined him at the table.

The latter's move in apparently welcoming the newcomer caused a sudden relaxation in the place. Tension disappeared, toughies lost interest in Mowry, the bar attendant lounged back, general conversation was resumed. That showed Floppy Jowls was sufficiently well-known among the hard-faced clientele for them to take on trust anyone known to him.

Meanwhile, he had squatted face to face with Mowry and introduced himself with, "My name is Arhava, Butin Arhava." He paused, waiting for a response that did not come, then went on, "You're a stranger. From Diracta. Specifically from Masham. I can tell by your accent."

"Clever of you," Mowry encouraged.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One has to be clever to get by. The stupid don't. They choke in a rope." He took a swig of *zith*. "You wouldn't walk into this place unless you were a genuine stranger—or one of the Kaitempi."

"No?"

"No, I don't think so. And the Kaitempi wouldn't dare send just one man in here. They'd send six. Maybe more. The Kaitempi would expect trouble aplenty in the Cafe Susun."

"That," said Mowry, "suits me very well."

"It suits me even better." Butin Arhava showed the snout of Pigface's gun over the edge of the table. It was pointed straight at the other's middle. "I do not like being followed. If this gun went off nobody in here would give a damn. You wouldn't worry either, not for long. So you'd better talk. Why have you been following me, *hi*?"

"You knew I was behind you all the time?"

"I did. What's the big idea?"

"You'll hardly believe it when I tell you." Leaning across the table, Mowry grinned straight into his scowling face. "I want to give you a thousand guilders."

"That's nice," said Arhava, unimpressed. "That's very nice." His eyes narrowed. "And you're all set to reach into your pocket and give it me, *hi*?"

Mowry nodded, still grinning. "Yes—unless you're so lily-livered that you prefer to reach into it yourself."

"You won't bait me that way," retorted Arhava. "I've got control of the situation and I'm keeping it, see? Now get busy dipping—but if what comes out of that pocket is a gun it's *you* and not me who'll be at the wrong end of the bang. Go ahead and dip. I'm watching."

With the weapon steadily aimed at him over the table's rim, Mowry felt in his right hand pocket, drew out a neat wad of twenty-guilder notes, poked them across. "There you are. They're all yours."

For a moment Arhava gaped with complete incredulity, then he made a swift pass and the notes vanished. The gun also disappeared. He lay back in his seat and studied Mowry with a mixture of bafflement and suspicion. "Now show me the string."

"No string," Mowry assured. "Just a gift from an admirer."

"Meaning who?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Me."

"But you don't know me from the Statue of Jaime."

"I hope to," said Mowry. "I hope to know you well enough to convince you of something mightily important."

"And that is what?"

"There's lots more money where that came from."

"Is that so?" Arhava gave a knowing smirk. "Well, where did it come from?"

"I just told you—an admirer."

"Don't give me that."

"All right. The conversation is over. It's been nice knowing you. Now get back to your own seat."

"Don't be silly." Licking his lips Arhava glanced cautiously around the room, reduced his voice almost to a whisper. "How much?"

"Twenty thousand guilders."

The other fanned his hands as if beating off an annoying fly. "Sh-h-h! Don't say it so loud!" Another leery look around the room. "Did you actually say *twenty thousand*?"

"Yar."

Arhava took a deep breath. "Who d'you want killed?"

"One—for a start."

"Are you serious?"

"I've just given you a thousand guilders and that's not funny. Besides, you can put the matter to the test. Cut a throat and collect—it's as easy as that."

"Just for a start, you said?"

"I did. By that is meant that if I like your work I'll offer further employment. I've got a list of names and will pay twenty thousand per body." Watching him for effect, Mowry put a note of warning into his voice. "The Kaitempi will reward you with ten thousand for delivering me into their hands. That's money for the taking and with no risk attached. But to get it you'll have to sacrifice all chance at a far bigger sum, maybe a million or more." He paused, finished with pointed sarcasm, "One does not flood one's own goldmine, does one?"

"Nar, not unless one is cracked." Arhava became slightly unnerved as his thoughts milled around. "And what makes you think I'm a professional killer?"

"I don't think anything of the sort. But I know you're a shady character, probably with a police record, otherwise you wouldn't have swiped that gun and neither would you dive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into a crummy joint like this. That means you're just the type who'll do some dirty work for me or, alternatively, can introduce me to someone who is willing to do it. Personally, I don't care a hoot who performs the task, you or your Uncle Smatsy. I reek of money. You love the scent of it. If you want to go on sniffing it you've got to do something about it."

Arhava nodded slowly, stuck a hand in his pocket and fondled the thousand guilders. There was a queer fire in his eyes. "I don't do that kind of work, it's not quite in my line. And it needs more than one, but—"

"But what?"

"Not saying. I've got to have time to think this over. I want to discuss it with a couple of friends."

Mowry stood up. "I'll give you four days to find them and chew the fat. By then you'd better have made up your mind one way or the other. I'll be here again in four days' time at this hour." Then he gave the other a light but imperative shove in the shoulder. "I don't like being followed either. Lay off if you want to grow old and get rich."

With that, he departed. Arhava remained obediently seated and gazed dreamily at the door. After a time he called for another *zith*. His voice was strangely hoarse.

The barman dumped the drink at his elbow, said with no great interest, "Friend of yours, Butin?"

"Yar—Datham Hain."

Datham Hain being the Sirian version of Santa Claus.

To be continued

Back Issues

For readers and collectors who are missing any of the previous issues we can still supply the following copies but stocks are very limited.

Nos. 33 to 39; 42 to 47; 51, 52, 54, 55; 57 to 68 2/- post free

NOVA PUBLICATIONS LTD.
Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Boland's contribution in this issue concerns a matter transmitter belonging to an alien race. If it fell into the hands of the unscrupulous it could be extremely dangerous. On the other hand, the effects of the machine itself had some rather peculiar properties.

SECRET WEAPON

By John Boland

He was a quadrupal-server, and when he walked into the bar of Quigley's Hotel, at the north pole of Brettel, the assembled company greeted him with the deference expected from crooks who were only single-servers, or at most double-servers.

"Hi, Melton!"

Melton Heese grinned round fiercely at them all, searching for the man he wanted. It was good to come back into congenial company after all the years on Globus Three, the penal world. In the far corner he saw his man and made his way through the smoke-laden atmosphere. "Hi, Prof!"

The Professor twisted his imposing head with its huge dome and venerable white beard, and surveyed the newcomer.

"Bless my panegyrics!" he said mildly. "If it is not my old friend and acquaintance, Melton Heese, undoubtedly the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worst criminal in the universe. I trust that your metabolism has not been unduly affected by your most recent incarceration, Melton?"

Melton grinned. The Professor always did talk posh. "I don't know about that, Prof," he said jovially, "but it might have done me good. I don't know yet."

The bleared brown eyes of the old man studied Heese. "And when will you know, friend?"

Leaning forward, the smile gone from his face, Melton said: "I dunno. Mebbe after I'd had a talk with you."

"Then perhaps we should adjourn to my suite." The Prof stood up, unwinding his long, thin body until it towered almost to the plasti-ceiling. He belched, then patted his stomach with a large hand. "I beg your pardon! This air! Low oxygen content, you know. Doesn't do my health the least bit of good."

In the long, narrow room behind the bar, which the Prof was pleased to call his 'suite,' he settled Melton on a foam chair, poured him out a tumbler of genuine Thylan scotch, and collapsed onto the bed. "Well, friend, proceed."

Melton downed some of the liquid and nodded appreciatively. "Good stuff." He took another drink then set his glass aside. "Prof, what do you know of a bloke named Burdoyne—Handred Burdoyne?"

The Professor stretched himself, turning his head slowly to study his guest, a gleam lighting his dull eyes. "Melton, friend, when you speak of the redoubtable Handred Burdoyne, it would be fitting to show due respect . . . He was a great man."

"Was he a liar?"

"Melton!" The reproach in the Professor's eyes appeared to be genuine. "Handred Burdoyne was the greatest—but the greatest—of the early space explorers. He was born in 2748, on Earth. Made his first voyage in 2798, then two years later worked on a machine that was going to take him beyond the edge of our galaxy."

Frowning, the Professor tugged at his beard.

"Now let me see. Was it in '07, or '08 that he crashed the time barrier? '08! Yes, that was it, 2808. Twenty years later he started the first of his colonising operations. He colonised Hathroon, Grand, Zyles, Tarbiton, Sendra, oh, and lots of others! He began Universal Interpol; he was respon-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sible for Terran being adopted as the universal tongue, and so on. He was a great man, Melton . . . except for what he did about Universal Interpol. But there, none of us is perfect."

"What happened to him?"

The Professor shrugged. "There I have no information, friend. He, his ship and his crew were lost without trace—somewhere in deep space. They set out to explore Galaxy Thirteen, but something went wrong and there's been no trace ever found of what happened." He shook his head. "Galaxy Thirteen . . . a wild, lonely place, by all accounts. Still unexplored, most of it."

"And likely to be, would you say?"

"Undoubtedly. There is nothing there."

"There might be."

"Such as?"

Melton shrugged. "There might be something worthwhile."

The Professor eyed the younger man shrewdly. "Correct me if I am wrong, Melton," he said slowly, "but my venerable nose begins to smell the presence of a rodent. I begin to perceive a chain of coincidences. Let me see. You have just completed a sentence on Globus Three, right?"

"Right."

"And Globus Three, which is a wild and dreadful place, from the accounts I am given, is halfway between this planet which we grace with our presence, and that wilderness in space, Galaxy Thirteen. Am I correct?" He went on without waiting for an answer. "And now friend Melton gets excited about a man who has been dead for two hundred years—or at least disappeared two hundred years ago. It makes mathematics to me."

"You're a smart space-man, Prof." From his pocket Melton took a sheet of plas-paper. "See this?" He unfolded it. "This is a chart to buried treasure, Prof."

"Oh, come now, Melton! You're not trying to work that oldie on me, are you! Charts to buried treasure indeed!"

"There's only one difference between this one and all the others you've seen or faked, Prof. This one is genuine."

The Professor tugged at his beard. "They never withdrew the reward offer for finding Burdoyne. You know where he is?"

Melton nodded. "Yes, I know where he is. But I ain't interested in the reward—that's no more than meteor-dust.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What I'm after is the Universe . . . and I can get it, if what this says is right !"

The Professor, face grave, produced a new bottle. " All right, what's the boost ?"

He listened intently to the other man's story. Melton, as a prisoner on Globus Three, had been sent on a solitary expedition to chart a range of unexplored hills. It was the standard practice, for by using convict labour to do such work, the controllers saved money. And if accident, or encounter with wild beasts caused the loss of a survey party, no one was worried.

" And you know what, Prof ?" Melton went on. " I hadn't been in the area no more than two days when I came across a wrecked warp-ship."

" The *Astroda* ! "

" That's it. The *Astroda*—well, the wreck of it, buried in the forest on the side of a hill. I figured something must have gone wrong when they were out in space and that they tried to make an emergency landing. The air lock astern was busted open, so I had a look inside. There were some skeletons —pretty badly smashed up, so the crew must have died when they hit—and this !" He held up the paper.

" Prof, if we can take advantage of what this says, we've got the Universe in our hands."

" A wise man proceeds cautiously." The Professor held out his hand for the paper. " What does the great man say ?"

" That on a planet named Plooda, in Galaxy Thirteen, the people have invented a Transmatter."

The old man shook his head. " If so—incredible ! Our scientists have been chasing that particular Philosopher's Stone for centuries."

" It's all here. Listen !

" The Ploodans are a splendid, kindly people, with a technology that at first seems totally inadequate for the standard of life such as we Terrans consider adequate. But this is, I soon discovered, a complete fallacy. They are in fact centuries ahead of us Terrans but in the main prefer a simple life, for they prefer to do many tasks by hand. Their crops are sown, tilled and harvested by hand. Clothes are made by hand ; all building is done by hand, and so on, for they believe that only in a Ploodan creating with his own hands can he find real happiness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" But despite their simple way of life they have developed complete weapons of protection against attack by anyone or any kind of force. They have got weapons of complete destruction. No enemy can escape, for it would be impossible. If they so wished they could be masters of the Universe, for these weapons can be used for attack. Yet they will never so be used. for they wish to live in peace.

" The Transmatter is a fantastic thing. Even when I saw the evidence with my own eyes I found it impossible to believe what I saw. That a living, fully-grown Terran should be able to *wish* himself somewhere, and to be instantly transported without harm . . . I could not accept it. Not, that is, until I underwent the ceremony myself. It is not a long or too tedious process, and when I came through it I could not grasp that I was now able to Transport.

" *But I was* !

" I wished myself inside one of their strongest buildings, and instantly found myself there, unharmed. It was a miraculous affair. I have seen the wonders of many galaxies, but none compared with this. True, the effective range is limited, being less than a mile, but this hardly lessens the wonder of it. There is also—"

" Well, go on," the Professor demanded.

"That's all there is. He must have been writing it all down when they ran into trouble."

" But there must have been more than one sheet !"

" Prof, that vessel had been buried open for two hundred years. Animals had lived in it ; animals had eaten every damned thing there was to eat in the thing. This one sheet was slipped under the magni-pad on the captain's desk on the flight deck. That's why it wasn't touched."

The old man wiped the sweat from his bald head. " Then that sheet may just as well have been lost as well, friend, for we'll never be able to find our way to Plooda. We could spend the rest of our lives looking for the place. Just think—the whole of Galaxy Thirteen to search."

Melton's pale face split into a grin.

" That's the beauty of it, Prof. I know where Plooda is. There was a chart of the galaxy under the magni-pad as well. Specially left there for us, it could have been !"

Beaming, the Professor stood up. " Fortune comes once to every man, my friend. And now . . . how long will it be before we go to collect ours ?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It took two weeks to locate a suitable warp-freighter on one of the space-ports. It was a small field, and there was only one guard, an old spacie, half crippled through cosmic bombardment, who spent most of his time asleep. The Prof reckoned he could con the ship, and it was merely a matter of stealing enough food to see them through the journey.

The warp-freighter was in good shape. She was one of a fleet of such vessels kept for part-time operation to handle seasonal shipments of crops.

"It's not going to be an easy voyage, Melton," the Professor stated. "Normally these things have a crew of four. And don't forget I'm no longer a young man." He was, it was rumoured, well over a hundred years of age, but he always kept his age a secret. It was his one vanity.

"Prof, if we take a crew of crooks along with us, we might end up as cosmic debris. They'd probably slit our space suits and push us out through the disposal chute. I don't want that. I don't want violence; I like gentle methods."

"A wise man's choice," the Prof agreed. The business on Plooda would have to be done carefully, otherwise Melton and he would be blasted by whatever form of frightfulness existed on the planet for the suppression of crime. He sighed. It had always been difficult for him to accept that there was sufficient for every man in the Universe—but that some men had too much. But now the unequal distribution of wealth seemed about to come to an end. He would have more than his share, and while he would still be able to deplore the unequal distribution of wealth he would be able to bear his unfair share with equanimity.

The journey to Plooda was boringly uneventful. Melton had served his time in warp-freighters before he began to serve a different sort of time, and he could recall all that was necessary in order to con the ship. He brought the vessel out of warp within a few hours' cruising distance of the planet.

Twice they circled the grey-green mass of Plooda before moving into the atmosphere. "Difficult to accept that there is a great treasure buried there," the Prof muttered as he stared at the planet's image on the look-out screens.

"The sooner we've got it buried in the hold, the better it'll suit me."

"Wise men hasten slowly." The Professor coughed. "I would advise caution, Melton. There is much we do not know. Handred's account—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Save it, Prof. We're going in."

A deputation of Ploodans, incredibly tall and only lath-thick, waited upon them as they landed. One of the Ploodans came forward, bowing. "You are, I believe, Terrans?"

"We are, and we greet you in the name of the Designer who has lit ten billion suns throughout the Universe." The Professor prided himself that he could handle any situation, and he felt that he had managed commendably, despite his dislike of these creatures' appearance. It was probably their height—they were at least double his own six foot three—or the fact that their eyes were on stalks—or a combination of these things. But he was a fair man and he realised that he and Melton must appear equally repugnant to the natives' view.

The leading Ploodan introduced himself. "I am Phlarr. I speak something of your language, but very poorly, I fear."

"How did you learn?"

"In the days of my childhood we had another of your race visit us. He was a great man—Handred Burdoyne. I trust he is still in space?"

The Professor looked up at the bean-pole figure towering over him. So he'd known Burdoyne! That meant this Ploodan must be the equivalent of at least two hundred Earth-years of age. Suddenly the Prof was excited. Maybe these people also knew the secret of long life? He would have to make careful enquiries, for he was, when he permitted himself to think of it, sadly aware that his own years were heavily accumulated.

Later, in the blue light that passed for evening on the planet, the Professor had to restrain his companion. "I know that you wish to get things moving, friend, but I beg of you to be patient. These creatures are not to be rushed; it would rouse their suspicions."

"Hell, man, I want to get off this dump and into a world where a man isn't a freak—where there's civilisation."

"All in good time, Melton, all in good time. It occurs to me that we haven't given a reason for our visit as yet, and the natives must be curious, however polite they may be. So in my opinion there'll be a move from their side before too long."

He was right. Phlarr called for them the next morning and conducted them to a meeting of the local council. In the brilliant green light of morning the air was exhilarating.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The gravitational pull of the planet was only about four-fifths that of Earth's, and the air had a high oxygen content. As they entered the council chamber, the Professor glanced quickly in warning at Melton, then set out to be his most suave.

Phlarr waved them to seats that had been specially constructed to conform to the size of the visitor's limbs, and then settled himself down to act as interpreter. During the following hours Melton hardly spoke at all, but his face registered his growing annoyance. When the meeting was over and the two men were outside, having declined Phlarr's offer to act as guide back to their quarters, Melton exploded.

"How much more time do you reckon we're going to waste?"

The Prof was reproachful. "But we haven't wasted any!"

"Then what the hell do you reckon we've been doing, sitting in that blasted room for hours, listening to those—those saplings talk?"

"If you intend to pull a confidence trick, then you've got to build up the sucker's confidence in you." Prof sorrowfully studied his companion's face, keeping his own feelings from showing.

Melton was a charming fellow, but he was apt to be a bit short-tempered at times, and when such times came round he was no longer pleasant, but instead became a killer. He was quite capable of pulling a gun on all and sundry if he thought things weren't going as he wanted. It was this failure that had landed him on Globus Three several times.

It was at the council meeting the next morning that things really began to move. Phlarr's stalked eyes regarded the two Earthlings with polite interest. "You must please excuse me if our Ploodan manners seem crude to you," he said smoothly, "but—"

There was a long silence. "But what?" the Prof asked.

"What has brought you here?"

The two men stared quickly at each other. The Prof cleared his throat. "When Handred Burdoyne visited you he was told something of a Transmatter . . ."

"That is so. We understood from him that there was no such things on Earth . . . But you have it now, of course."

"N—no, we haven't. That's what we came to see you about. You see, the Earth governors, when they learned of the existence of such apparatus—when they learned of its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

existence, they decided to send us on a mission to ask if you would teach us the technique. It would be of great service to us." The Prof was well away now, spinning his story with such conviction that he almost began to believe it himself.

Phlarr jabbered to his companions for a time, then spoke in Terran. "If we can help our cosmic neighbours, we shall be only too pleased. It would appear that yours is a backward planet, and if we can help you towards real progress we shall be delighted."

The Prof took the insult without blinking. "You are too kind."

"It is nothing. Your kinsman told us something of your backwardness when he landed here. From what you tell us it would appear that you have made little progress in the last two centuries of your existence." The stalked eyes swivelled to look at Melton. "Your prisons, for example. Do you still have such places."

"Yes we do," Melton said feelingly.

"Distressing!" Phlarr seemed to be sad. "We can help you to put an end to such things."

For the first time Melton brightened. "You mean you ain't got any prisons here?"

"But of course not. We ceased such barbaric practises three thousand years ago."

Even the Prof was interested. "This is astounding news!" he said fervently. "But tell me, there must be *some* sort of control over your criminal classes?"

"We have none—" Phlarr began, but Melton interrupted.

"Some other time, Prof. Right now, we've got that government business to see to. If these—these people don't mind, I'd like to have me a demonstration."

Phlarr waved his stick-like arms. "A thousand pardons!" He made some rapid comments in his own tongue, then bowed to the two visitors. "Please to follow me."

The two men tagged behind their guide, the Prof putting a hand on Melton's sleeve to slow him down. "I don't like this, friend. It's too easy."

Melton laughed. "Don't get scared, man. They're just suckers, that's all."

"There is an old proverb which says 'Beware the easy path for it leads downhill'."

"I've got one of my own, pal. It says: 'Grab what you can while the going's good.' Any comments?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But if the Professor had any to make he didn't utter them for at that moment Phlarr stopped. The three of them were standing on the edge of an open field that was possibly half a mile square. The ground was flat and bare, with no cover anywhere apart from the low hedge that bounded the field.

"You will please to watch me," Phlarr said.

They stared at him intently, wondering what was going to happen. In the Professor's mind there came an uneasy memory that this might be an execution ground. Maybe this talking tree had brought them out there to blast them where it wouldn't do any harm to the buildings? Suddenly he blinked. He was looking at nothing.

The space where Phlarr had been was empty.

"By Rigel! It's true. They can do it!" Melton swore in excitement, then stopped. A thin, piping cry like the call of a bird made them squint into the bright light. On the far side of the field, fully eight hundred yards away, a piece of red material was being waved. Phlarr was waving his coat to attract their attention. Even as they looked he disappeared and a second later they whirled as his voice came from behind them. He was less than three yards away.

"A magnificent, awe-inspiring display!" the Prof said breathlessly, his eyes scanning the tall, thin figure. "Er—there does not appear to be any visible apparatus . . . ?"

"That is so. The ability is induced by exposure to the rays of a machine."

"You can do it when you like?" Melton was sweating. "You can switch from one place to another, just when you like?"

"Yes. The range is limited, of course, otherwise we might have considered space travel. But all we can manage is a range of about one mile."

Melton grinned fiercely. "That's far enough for me, pal. A mile, eh? And you can travel through solid objects?"

"Naturally."

The Prof shook his head. "It seems far from natural to me."

"You worry too much, Prof." Melton grinned up at Phlarr. "Can you show me and the Prof how to do that disappearing trick?"

"If you so desire."

"That I do."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then it shall be done. Two days from now there is an initiation ceremony. Many of our young men will pass through the Transmatter machine. If you would care to join them . . . ?"

For the fiftieth time the Professor shook his head. "No, I don't like it. There's a snag somewhere."

Melton, lying on his bunk, smiled patiently. He could afford to be pleasant. By tomorrow he'd have the secret in his grasp, and when he did . . . It was a pleasant dream he was having. One in which he could enter any bank, any building anywhere, and help himself to what he wanted . . . !

But for the Prof it was very different. This was all too easy, and all his life he'd been taught that the good things didn't come easy. You had to work for them. Even if it was something simple, like hi-jacking a warp-freighter, you had to plan to do it, you had to take risks in executing the plans.

"We'd better keep clear of this business until we know more about it."

"Ah, shut your grumble-hole !"

But the night hours did nothing to make the Prof change his mind, and as he was on the way to meet Phlarr, who had arranged to see them at the council chamber, Prof did his best to make Melton see reason. "You don't know what we might be letting ourselves in for. Human beings might not be able to tolerate the treatment. It might have been this business that made Burdoyne crash on his way back to Earth."

The pleas did nothing but turn Melton's mood of pleasantness into one of sudden rage. "If you don't stop whining, Prof, I swear I'll smear your dust all over deep space."

Prof quietened down as they reached the council chamber. Phlarr was there alone. He greeted them and asked them to follow him down the long, gently-sloping corridors of the building. They walked for a long way before they turned a corner and came into a huge open chamber.

The place was packed with hundreds of half-grown Ploodans with here and there an adult towering above them. A crackle of speech came over an amplifier and Phlarr whispered an interpretation. "The first young men are ready to go through the machine," he whispered.

There was no evidence of a machine. On the far side of the huge chamber there were two narrow doors, one grey, one purple. A short flight of steps led up to and away from the doors, and as the two Earthmen watched, about a dozen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the young Ploodans stalked up to the grey door, opening it and passing out of sight one by one until they had all gone.

Less than a minute later the purple door opened and a young Ploodan emerged, wearing a scarlet coat. A rustling cheer went up at sight of him more cheers greeting the appearance of similar figures. Phlarr was whispering again. "The coloured garment is a sign of adulthood."

"Interesting, most interesting," Prof muttered, his fears forgotten for the moment. "So these red coats are a symbol of tribal acceptance! But is there no more to the ceremony? Have they undergone exposure to the machine?"

"Yes." He stared gravely down on them. "If you desire to pass through the machine, the young men will have no objection to your going in front of them. It has been explained to them and they are happy that you should join them."

It proved to be a ridiculously easy experience. Behind the grey door there was a short passage which led into a tiny room. As the Prof got inside the room the walls, floor and ceiling glowed momentarily with an intense white light, then faded back to normality. On the far side of the room there was another passage and as he went along it a grave Ploodan waited to drape a red coat over his shoulders. As he emerged from the purple door there was a roar of cheers that sounded like a gale of wind passing through a forest, and he saw thousands of twig-like arms waving at him.

Feeling curiously warm, as though he had some sort of central heating system in-built, Prof stared at Melton. "I can't believe that anything has happened."

Melton pushed his way through the crowd to where Phlarr was standing. "Can we do it now? Can we transmit ourselves?"

For the next hour the two men amused themselves by using their new power. It was simple to operate. All they had to do was to wish themselves in a certain spot which they had previously chosen, close their eyes, and then when they opened their eyes again they found themselves in the new place.

In the afternoon Melton asked to be taken on a conducted tour of the city, while the Prof rested. When Melton returned the was happy.

"Prof, tomorrow we head back for Earth. You and me, we'll spend the rest of our lives in luxury. But before we go, I reckon we'll help ourselves to some of the phroston they've got stored here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" Don't be crazy ! They'd destroy us !"

" I'm not crazy, old man. Listen, this afternoon I got 'em to show me where they keep all their most precious stores. There's a building with enough phroston stored there to set us up for life."

Phroston was about eighty times as hard as a diamond, and worth scores of thousands of credits per carat.

" Leave it alone, Melton. We've had enough from these people."

" All right, if you don't want to go shares, stay out of it."

The Prof blinked. Where Melton had been standing was now empty space. Even though he could do it himself, it was still a frightening trick. " The damned idiot !" he muttered to himself. " He's never satisfied. He'll get us both killed if he isn't careful." He jumped violently as Melton materialised immediately in front of him.

" *Don't do that* ! "

He was going to say more, but stopped. Melton's eyes were wide open and he was panting as though he had undergone great strain in the past few minutes. " What is it ?" There was a touch of panic in the Prof's voice.

Melton grabbed his arm and tried to control his rapid breathing. " Some—something wrong, Prof !" he gasped. " You—you come with me."

It took some doing, but at last the two men stood in a vault-like room. On every side there were glass shelves, and on the shelves scores of thousands of phroston stones of all shapes and sizes. There was enough wealth there to buy a small galaxy.

" Put some of those stones in your tunic," Melton whispered. He was sweating and trembling. " Go on."

The Prof was cautious. " Me ? Why not you ?"

" Please, old man. Try it."

Prof was so startled by his companion's politeness that he gaped. " All right, if you want me to." He moved along the lines of shelves, searching for the pick of the stones. At last he saw the ones he wanted. Blue giants, scores of them, and each one worth sufficient to provide a man with a century of luxurious living. He stretched out a hand and when his fingers were within an inch of the stones his body froze solid.

He could feel the sweat break out all over his body as he tried to force his fingers to obey the instructions given them

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by his brain. But nothing happened. It was as though his hand was clamped in an invisible vice. He tried with his left hand but the result was the same. Eyes bulging, he turned to Melton.

"I—I can't pick them up!"

For a moment he panicked. It was impossible to move, and when the Ploodans opened up for business in the morning they would find him. Then he remembered the Transmatter ceremony and closed his eyes. When he was able to open them again he was back at the sleeping quarters, and Melton was standing looking at him.

"What do you make of it, Prof.? Some sort of a force field?"

Prof flexed his fingers. They obeyed every command he gave them. Suddenly the appalling truth occurred to him, but it was so shattering that he refused to accept it. Before he would admit it he had to make a test. He transmatted himself into the nearest Ploodan house. Hanging from a peg on the wall there was a scarlet tunic. Prof stretched out a hand to steal the coat, but when his fingers were an inch from the cloth his body became rigid and he began to sweat.

More than anything in the universe he wanted to steal that cheap, worn coat. His brain was screaming instructions to his hand, but without avail. His brain begged, pleaded, entreated his fingers to steal, but they could not. Now he knew the bitter awful truth. When the Ploodans were exposed to the Transmatter ceremony they didn't only have the gift of instantaneous and invisible movement granted to them; there was another ingredient that was implanted. Honesty of action.

No matter how much a Ploodan wanted to he would be unable to steal or do anything wrong, once he had passed through the Transmatter light. That accounted for the absence of prisons. The criminal was imprisoned in his own fleshly frame. There was no escape.

The Prof groaned. It was the most devilish punishment that anyone could have devised. He groaned again as he thought of the long years ahead. They offered a dreadful prospect.

He was doomed to make an honest living from now on. It hardly bore-thinking of, but he brightened a little when he thought of Melton. Melton would take it badly. And he deserved to, for if it hadn't been for him . . . !

John Boland

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back in 1955 we published two stories by Alan Guthrie in which he developed special reasons why Man would never be able to travel in interplanetary space. In the following story by American author Harry Harrison he developes a similar premise, with the difference that Man gets into space — but doesn't know anything about it.

CAPTAIN BEDLAM

By Harry Harrison

" What is space like ? How do the naked stars really look? Those are hard questions to answer." Captain Jonathan Bork looked around at the eager, intent faces waiting for his words, then dropped his eyes to his space-tanned hands on the table before him.

" Sometimes it's like falling into a million-mile pit, other times you feel like a fly in the spider web of eternity, naked under the stars. And the stars are so different—no flickering, you know, just the tiniest spots of solid light."

Even as he told them he cursed himself a thousand times for the liar he was. Capt. Bork, spaceship pilot. The single man privileged to see the stars in the space between worlds. And after five round trips to Mars he had no idea of what it was really like out there. His body piloted the ship, but Jonathan Bork had never seen the inside of a ship's control room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not that he ever dared admit it aloud. When people asked him what it was like he told them—using one of the carefully memorized speeches from the textbooks.

With an effort he pulled his mind away from the thought and back to the table surrounded by guests and relatives. The dinner was in his honour so he tried to live up to it. The brandy helped. He finished most of it, then excused himself as soon as he could.

The family house was old enough to have a pocket-sized backyard. He went there, alone, and put his back against the dark building still warm from the heat of the day. The unaccustomed brandy felt good, and when he looked up the stars wheeled in circles until he closed his eyes.

Stars. He had always looked at the stars. From the time he had been a child they had been his interest and his drive. Everything he had ever done or studied had that one purpose behind it. To be one of the select few to fly the space lanes. A pilot.

He had entered the academy when he was seventeen, the minimum age. By the time he was eighteen he knew the whole thing was a fake.

He had tried hard to ignore the truth, to find some other explanation. But it was no good. Everything he knew, everything he was taught in the school added up to one thing. And *that* was an impossible conclusion.

It was inescapable and horrible so finally he had put it to the test. It happened in physiology class, where they were working out problems in relation to orientation and consciousness in acceleration, using Paley's theorum. He had raised his hand timidly, but Eagle-eye Cherniki had spotted it and growled him to his feet. Once he was committed the words came out in a rush.

"Professor Cherniki, if we accept Paley's theorum, in a problem like this with only minimal escape-G, we go well below the consciousness threshold. And the orientation factor as well, it seems to me . . . that, well . . ."

"Mr. Bork, just what are you trying to say?" Cherniki's voice had the cold incision of a razor's edge.

Jon took the plunge. "There can be only one conclusion. Any pilot who takes off in a ship will be knocked out or unable to orientate enough to work the controls."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The classroom rocked with laughter and Jon felt his face warm and redden. Even Cherniki allowed himself a cold grin when he answered.

"Very good. But if what you say is true, then it is impossible to fly in space—and we do it every day. I think you will find that in the coming semester we will go into the question of changing thresholds under stress. That should—"

"No, sir," Jon broke in. "The texts do *not* answer this question—if anything they avoid it. I've read every text for this course as well as other related texts—"

"Mr. Bork, are you calling me a liar?" Cherniki's voice was as frigid as his eyes. A dead hush fell over the classroom. "You are dismissed from this class. Go to your quarters and remain there until you are sent for."

Trying not to stumble, Jon went across the room and out the door. Every eye was fixed on him and he felt like a prisoner on the last mile. Instead of getting an answer to his question it looked as if he had got himself in deep trouble. Sitting in his room he tried not to think of the consequences.

He had never been certain he could get into pilot training —even though it had been his only ambition. Just about one out of 100 made it that far, the rest ending up in the thousand other jobs of the space fleet. Very few washed completely out of the Academy; the entrance requirements were so high that deadheads never got that far. Of course, there were exceptions—and it was beginning to look like he was one of them.

When the intercom finally called him to the president's office he was almost ready for it. He still jumped when it barked for him then he got up quickly and left taking the elevator to the executive level. The cold-faced secretary nodded him in, and he was alone with the Admiral.

Admiral Sikelm had retired from active service when he took over the presidency of the Academy. He had never lost the manner or voice of command and everyone on campus referred to him only as "The Admiral." Jon had never been this close to him before and was struck speechless. The Admiral however, did no barking or growling, just talked quietly to put him at ease.

"I have seen Professor Cherniki and he told me what happened in class. I have also listened to the taped recording of your conversation with him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This doubly surprised Jon ; it was the first he had heard that the classes contained concealed recorders. The Admiral went on, with the very last words Jon had expected to hear.

" Congratulations, Mr. Bork, you have been accepted for pilot training. Your classes begin next week—*if* you wish to continue training." Jon started to talk, but the Admiral stopped him with an upraised palm. " I want you to listen first before you give me your answer. As you have already discovered, space flight is not all that it appears to be.

" When we first hit space we were losing nine out of ten ships. And not through mechanical failure either. Telemetering equipment on the pilots showed us where the trouble lay—space is just not made for the human body. Gravity changes, blood pressure, free fall, radiation narcosis, all of these combined with a dozen other causes we discovered later to put the pilot out of action. If he didn't black out completely or lose control, the disorientation of the new stimuli made it impossible for him to operate the ship.

" So we had a stalemate. Plenty of good ships with no one to fly them. We tried drugs, hypnosis and a number of other things to fit men for space. They all failed for the same reason. By the time we adjusted men for space they were so doped and controlled that they were again unable to do the job.

" It was Dr. Moshe Kahn who solved the problem—you've heard of him ?"

" Just vaguely—wasn't he first director of the Psych Corps?"

" Yes—that's all he is known for in the public record. Maybe, some day, he can get the credit due him. Dr. Kahn was the man who enabled us to conquer space.

" His theory, that was proven to be absolutely true, was that man as we know him, *homo sapiens*, is unfit for space. Dr. Kahn set out to create *homo nova*, men who could live and work in space. Under the correct mental conditions the human body is capable of unusual feats—such as walking through fire or possessing the rigid strength of a hypnotised patient. Dr. Kahn reasoned that the body's potentialities are great enough, all he had to do was create the *mind* of *homo nova*. This he did by inducing a condition of dual personality in adults."

" I don't understand, sir," Jon broke in, " wouldn't it have been easier to work with children, babies—condition them from the very beginning ?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" Of course," the Admiral said, " but happily we have laws to prevent just that sort of thing. Dr. Kahn never considered that approach ; he used men, volunteers—most of them with some experience in space. Cases of multiple personality have been documented as far back as the nineteenth century, but no one had ever tried to *create* a separate personality. Kahn did it and he created the kind of personality he wanted. What is terrifying, upsetting or uncomfortable for a normal person is the natural environment of these new personalities. They are able to pilot ships between the planets. Using frozen sleep, passengers could also be carried to the planets without experiencing the terrible rigours of space.

" The entire programme has been kept a secret—for good and obvious reasons. I can hear the howls now if people knew they were travelling with an unconscious pilot—an insane pilot I imagine they would call it since this is a kind of induced insanity. The only people who know about the programme are the instructors, the pilots and a few high officials.

" Since the pilots are all volunteers—and the programme *works*—there are no ethical rules being broken. As you have seen, even the students in this school have no idea of the real nature of a space pilot. If they accept the cover-up in their text books they go on to other jobs in the Corps. If they have the capacity to think and understand—like you—they will understand the need for a programme like this. They will have the knowledge to know what they are getting into if they volunteer.

" I think that covers the whole picture—unless you have any questions."

Jon thought a moment. " Just one, and it may sound a little foolish. Just what are—the physical symptoms connected with this training ? I mean will I really be a little bit—"

" Insane ? Only by definition. The new personality, Jon II, can only exist in the specialized environment of the ship's control cabin. Your original personality, Jon I, assumes command all the time on the outside. The only sensation you will have will be periods of amnesia. The personalities are distinct and separate. Each blacks out completely when the other is dominant."

Jon's mind was made up—had been made up for quite a while.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I still look forward to being a pilot, Admiral. I don't see that all of this alters that fact any."

They shook hands then, the Admiral a little sadly. He had done this many times before. He knew it did not always turn out exactly as the young volunteers imagined.

Jon left the school the same afternoon, without seeing any of his classmates. The Pilot Training School was in a different part of the same base and a new world altogether.

The thing he liked most was the feeling of having arrived. He was no longer treated like a student, but as a responsible equal. He was one of a select few. There were only twelve students in the school at the time and over 1,500 men on the training staff. It soon became abvious why.

The first few weeks were mostly physical examinations and tests. Then came the endless sessions with the encephalograph and in the hypno chambers. Jon had nightmares at first and many days had a period of half-awake, strange sensations. This was only in the beginning. The first step in the programme was separating the two personalities completely. Once this happened Jon I had no knowledge of Jon II. Time went by very fast for him since he wasn't aware of most of the training.

Part of the programme was orientation, teaching him how to accept and live with the hidden half of his mind. He, of course, could never meet Jon II, but he did watch another pilot's II personality. Jenkins was the one he saw, a slim boy about a year older than Jon. It was a Fine Motor Control Under Acceleration test that he watched. He found it hard to believe. The Jenkins in the test chair only faintly resembled the one he knew. Jenkins II had an expressionless face and a smoothness of motion that Jenkins I could never have. He sat in the acceleration cage that moved in sudden surges in random directions. At the same time Jenkins II had to throw small switches on a control board in response to a changing signal pattern. His fingers moved carefully, flicking the tiny switches placed only an inch apart—while the cage made sudden 3-G swoops. Jenkins II's muscles were bar-hard to counteract the acceleration, but it was more than mere strength that gave the control. Heightened perception noted every thrust as it started and the opposed muscles countered with exactly the right amount of counterthrust. It was the automatic balance of an old sailor on a pitching ship, refined down to the smallest motion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Jon II was firmly established, Jon I had some uncomfortable experiences. Instead of coming through in the psych room one day, he found himself in the hospital. There was a tremedous gash across his palm and two fingers were broken.

"Training accident," the doctor said. "Something went wrong in the G cage and you saved yourself a good bit of injury by grabbing a bracing rod. Hurt your hand a little, that's all. Here's the rod."

The doctor smiled when he gave Jon the piece of metal—and he could see why. It was half-inch steel and the weight of his body on his fingers had bent and broken the rod. Jon I would have difficulty bending it with a hammer.

All of the training was not for Jon II's benefit. Once the second personality was strongly established, training time was split about 50-50. Jon I learned everything there was to know about a spacer—outside of the control room. He took charge of the ship on the ground—check-ups, repairs, even passenger good will. Jon I was the pilot and everyone had to have faith in him. They could never know that he blacked out whenever he entered the control room.

He tried many times to see it, but never could. The control room was the deeply implanted device that triggered the personality shift. As soon as Jon I took a step through the door or even as much as glanced inside—he was through. Jon II was in his domain and took over instantly.

Graduation day was the most important, and the same time the most frustrating day of his entire life. There was no such thing as a graduating class. As each pilot finished his training he graduated at a public ceremony. Most of the base personnel turned out, at least 30,000 men. They paraded and Jon marched out in front of them in his pilot's black uniform. The Admiral himself took out the platinum wings—oldest symbol of man's flight—and snapped them on. It was a moment to remember.

There was just time to say goodbye to his family, when the ship was ready. That was another feature of graduation day. The new pilot made his first flight. A short hop to the moon with a shipload of supplies—but still a flight. He had climbed the ramp to the entrance, turned to wave to his family, small specks in the distance. Then he had stepped into the control room.

Then he had stepped out through the lock onto the surface of the moon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There had been no sensation of time. One instant he had been on Earth ; in the next breath he was on the moon. Only the fact that he was wearing a spacesuit and his muscles were tired and sore convinced him. It was the most anti-climatic experience of his life . . .

In the garden on Earth, looking up at the newly risen moon, Jon thought about the past and tasted it dry as ashes in his mouth. Inside the house someone laughed and he heard the tinkle of bottle against glass. He pushed the thoughts away then and remembered where he was.

His family's house, the party in his honour. He had put them off time after time, then was finally forced to accept. It was just as bad as he had thought it would be. It is one thing to live a lie with yourself—something totally different to be a false hero in your own home.

Squaring his shoulders and flicking a speck of invisible dust from his jacket, he went back inside.

The following morning he reported to base for the 48-hour examination and sweat period that preceded all flights. His physical system was tuned to maximum potentiality by the doctors while he was briefed on the flight. It was to be the longest yet, and the most important.

" A long trip," the briefing officer said, tapping the chart, " to Jupiter—or rather the eighth satellite. One of the retrograde ones. There is a base and an observatory there now, as you know, but a new bunch of observers are going out. Astrophysicists to do work with Jupiter's gravity. Twelve of them and all their equipment. That's quite a load. Your main concern—or rather II's—will be the asteroid belt. You can't get too far away from the ecliptic so you may contact meteoric debris. We've had some trouble that way already. With a little luck you should complete a successful flight."

Jon shook hands with the passengers when they came aboard and checked the technicians when they sealed the freeze chambers. When everything was secured he climbed an internal companionway to the control room. This was the point where he always held back a bit. Once he pushed open the door he was committed. It was the last act of free will he had, then Jon II took over. He hesitated only a second, then pushed the door open, thinking to himself—*next stop, Jupiter.*

Only it wasn't Jupiter, it was pain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He couldn't see and he couldn't hear. A thousand sensations were forced on him at once. They added up to pain. Bigger, redder and more horrifying than he ever thought possible. It took an effort of will to blink his eyes and try to focus them.

In front of him was the viewport and beyond it was the stars. He was in space, in the cabin of the ship. For an instant he almost forgot the pain at the sight of the stars spread out before him. Then the pain was back and he was trying to understand what had happened, wanting to do something to end the torment. The cabin was dark, the only illumination the lights on the giant control boards. They flickered and changed, he had no idea of their meaning or what to do.

Then the pain was too much and he screamed and lost consciousness.

In the few moments Jon I had been in command of their body, Jon II had drained away a little of his panic. He had lost control and blacked out. He couldn't let it happen again. Neural blocks cut off a good deal of the pain, but enough seeped through to interfere with his thinking. A meteorite—it must have been a meteorite.

There was a fist-sized opening in the front bulkhead, and air was roaring out through the gap. He could see a single star through the hole, brighter and clearer than any star he had ever seen before. The meteorite had made that hole, then hit the wall behind him. That must have been the explosion and the glare when it vapourised. It had done a lot of damage, sprayed molten metal all over him and destroyed the circuits in his chair pedestal. It was getting hard to breathe, the air was almost gone. And cold.

The spacesuit was in its locker, just ten feet away. Only the straps that held him in the chair couldn't be opened. The electric release was destroyed, the mechanical release jammed. He struggled with the clasps, but he only had his bare hands.

All the time it was getting harder to breathe. The panic was there again and he could no longer fight it away.

Jon II gasped and his eyes closed. Jon I opened them.

The pain was overwhelming and washed over him instantly. Jon's eyes closed again and his body slumped forward.

Then he straightened and jerkily the eyelids opened. For a moment his eyeballs rolled unsteadily, then fixed. They looked straight ahead and were almost vacant of anything like reason.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Jon III was closer to the basic animal than any man or animal that had ever walked the earth. *Survive* was the only thing he knew. *Survive* and *save the ship*. He was dimly aware of Jon I and Jon II and could call on their memories if he needed to. He had no memories or thoughts of his own —except pain. Born in pain and doomed forever to live in pain, his whole world was pain.

Jon III was a built-in safety device, an admission that there might be times when even the II personality of a pilot couldn't save the ship. Only in the last extreme, when all else had failed, could the III personality assume control.

There was nothing at all subtle about Jon III's control. *See a problem—solve the problem.* The memory, still in his forebrain, was " get the space-suit." He started to stand up, then realised for the first time he couldn't. With both hands he pulled against the strap across his chest, but it didn't break. The clasp was the answer ; he had to open that.

No tools, just his hands. Use his hands. He put one finger inside the clasp and pulled. The finger bent, stretched and broke. Jon III felt no pain at all, no emotion. He put his second finger in and tugged again. The second finger was almost pulled off, and hung only by a piece of flesh. He put in the third finger.

The clasp finally broke when he pulled with his thumb. The rest of the hand hung, broken and disfigured. With a surge of power he pushed himself out of the chair. The femur in his right leg cracked and broke at the same time the lower strap did. Pulling with his good hand and pushing with his left leg he squirmed across the floor to the space-suit cabinet.

The air in the cabin was almost a vacuum. He had to keep blinking to wash away the ice crystals that formed on his eyes. His heart was beating at four times its regular rate to force the trace of oxygen to the dying body.

Jon III was aware of these things, but they didn't bother him. His world had always been like that. The only way he could regain the peace of his mindless oblivion was to finish what he had started. He never knew, had never been taught, that dying was also a way out.

Carefully and methodically he pulled down the spacesuit and climbed into it. He turned the oxygen on and closed the last zipper. Then he closed his eyes with a sigh of relief.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jon II opened his eyes and felt the pain. He could bear it now because he knew he was going to get out of this mess and save the ship. An emergency patch stopped the rush of air and while pressure was building up from the reserve tanks he examined the board. The ship could be flown on the secondary and manual circuits. All he had to do was rig them.

When the pressure reached seven pounds he stripped off the spacesuit and gave himself first-aid. He was a little surprised to see the state his right hand was in. He couldn't remember doing that. Jon II wasn't equipped to solve that kind of problems though. He hurried the dressings and burn ointment and turned back to his repairs. It was going to be a successful trip after all.

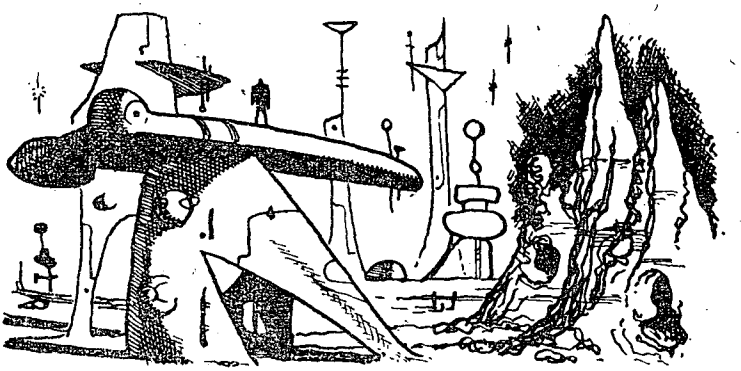
Jon never knew about Jon III—he was the unknown safety factor that was there always, dormant and waiting. Jon I thought Jon II had got them out of the mess. Jon II didn't bother to think about things like that. His job was to fly the ship.

Jon recuperated slowly at the hospital on Jupiter 8. He was amazed at the amount of damage his body had suffered, yet pulled through. The pain was bad for a long time, but he didn't really mind. It wasn't too high a price to pay.

He wasn't going to be a liar any more. He had been a pilot, even if for only a few seconds.

He had seen the stars in space.

Harry Harrison



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is the first of a series of articles dealing with Man's journey into outer space, based on information being released by the various scientific bodies concerned as the results of experiments are completed. Getting out of our atomosphere will obviously be the hardest job.

OUTWARD BOUND

1. The First 100 Miles

By Kenneth Johns

The " Conquest of the Space Frontier " is no longer just a dramatic phrase used to evoke an emotional response—during the last two years more progress has been made towards factual space flight than in the preceding two millenia.

Yet such is the flood of scientific news that what once would have been headline news now hardly runs to a filler at the foot of page five of otherwise occupied daily newspapers.

The mounting tempo of research into the problems of human survival in space has brought to light many difficulties that were not even known to exist a few years ago. Although these have been overcome, the main problem—the sheer brute power needed to fling a ship into space is still the prime barrier between Man and space.

In their upward probing, scientists now think of high altitude research flight in terms both of the collection of physical data from the upper air and of the physiological and psychological stresses upon their high-flying volunteers. Looking beyond

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

present human limitations, they extended their work on the effects of cosmic rays on the human structure by using a Skyhook balloon to lift parts of a dead man to a height of twenty-four miles, and suspend him there in a pressurised gondola whilst bulleting primary cosmic rays coursed through his tissues. The gondola with its grisly load of skull, brain and other selected organs was recovered and microscope slides made from the remains.

On November 8th, 1956, a giant polythene balloon lifted two U.S. Navy meteorologists to a then record-breaking fourteen and a third miles. Their object was to make meteorological and auroral measurements; but their physiological reactions were also continually monitored, by electrodes converting pulse and respiratory rates, heart and lung noises and the electrical impulses of their hearts into electronic form. Telemetered back to their base, this information told the waiting medical experts more than the terse reports from fourteen miles up, and revealed information that could not have been known before, even on the previous record-breaking flight in 1935, when Explorer II reached 13¾ miles.

The Strato-Lab gondola used in this experiment was built as long ago as 1946; but only recently were the two thousandth of an inch thick plastic balloons thought to be sufficiently reliable to be entrusted with human lives at these heights. The gondola and spacesuits worn by the crew were first tested in a large vacuum chamber at a pressure equivalent to a height of twenty miles above sea level. This gave the two officers practice in the technique of breathing without air surrounding their suits—the trick is to learn to exhale deliberately and then let the air pressure in the suit force air back into the lungs; the opposite to normal breathing.

Previously they had ballooned to 8 miles high in an open gondola; but this time the gondola was pressurised with an oxygen-enriched atmosphere at a pressure equivalent to a height of three miles. The oxygen store was five litres of liquid oxygen, whilst chemicals were used to remove water vapour and carbon dioxide. The crew's intention was to float near the balloon's ceiling for about three hours whilst they made their measurements. They reached fourteen and a third miles and released sufficient helium to drop a thousand feet—and then disaster struck.

A helium valve stuck and, as gas leaked out, the balloon fell. Only by releasing all their steel dust-ballast and tossing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overboard expensive instruments were they able to make a landing on their thick foam-plastic shock absorber— a rough and tumble landing, but a safe one.

Then, in June of 1957, the U.S.A.F. with their Project Manhigh, went a few miles better than the Navy. The balloon used distended to two million cubic feet and the gondola was a cylinder, three feet in diameter and seven feet high. Captain Kittinger, the ascending officer, had, with good reason, undergone ten tests for claustrophobia prior to the flight and was sealed in seven hours before takeoff. The plan called for a stay of twelve hours at the balloon's ceiling. On the 78 minute ascent the radio telephone failed and Kittinger was able to receive in speech but to transmit only in code. After about two and a half hours an oxygen leak forced the head of the U.S.A.F. Aero Medical Laboratories—Colonel Stapp of rocket railroad fame—to order the return, and Kittinger, as he released helium, was talked down by aeroplane pilots, a neat illustration of co-operation.

The last test in this U.S.A.F. balloon series was a conspicuous success. Major David Simmons spent 32 hours aloft, sixteen of which were over 90,000 feet, and reached a height of about nineteen and a third miles. Lack of sleep and a rise in the CO_2 content of his capsule forced him to return to Earth. Fresh data was accumulated on this ascent and more information is still to be released.

It is noteworthy that these two earlier big balloon projects were cut short by equipment failure. So, too, was the first test version of the long-awaited Atlas ICBM. At 8,000 feet one of the twin rockets malfunctioned, cartwheeling the missile and, after a flight duration of 55 seconds, forcing the control officers to explode it by remote control. This was a more spectacular failure; but again it was purely mechanical. Present standards have a long way to go before they reach the 99.9999 + % reliability expected of spaceship equipment upon which will depend the lives of the crew. The necessity of continuing to work efficiently for weeks on end in cramped conditions demands that the crew can rely without thought on their equipment.

One of the major technical difficulties in rocket technique will be the actual landing of small spaceships and ferry craft. Coming in to a planet with an atmosphere gives a natural

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brake to the ship, whilst the absence of air means that the ship must use her main drive for deceleration. But what of the actual landing?

A parachute would need to be of fantastic size even for a moderately sized ship on landing on atmospheric worlds, so that here we are left with the possibility of sitting a fast moving ship down on the sea in a diminishing series of gigantic skips or of squatting her down using sheer power alone. In the latter method, provided the power is available, the snag lies in the split-second timing essential to give directional control. Current experiments would seem to give the answers.

In May of 1957 news was released that the Ryan X-13 Vertijet had not only taken off in vertical flight, a relatively simple procedure, but had also made successful vertical landings. Of interest because of the similarity to future spaceship manoeuvres, the X-13 was raised to a vertical position by a tip-up platform so that the plane hung like a bat from a cable stretched between two steel arms. Then, riding the hot jet, she slowly rose, curved forward and accelerated into normal flight. Returning, she slowed as she came across the airport, raised her nose and balanced on the jet. Then the pilot 'walked' her across to the pick-up cable and steel arms until the hook in the nose protruded over the cable, the arms and cable lifted, the pilot killed the jet, and the plane was suspended in her takeoff position.

The pilot's seat swivelled as the plane turned and control of the delicate manoeuvring was obtained by deflecting the jet. It is more than probable that the final tricky movements were controlled by an automatic landing robot. The lesson for astronauts here is in the 'walking' of the ship—it seems highly unlikely that arms and cables will await the first ship to touch down on the Moon.

Another X, the North American X-15, is being built to explore the effects of very high speed flying. Expected to reach a record-breaking 4,000 to 5,000 m.p.h. and a height of 100 miles for a manned ship, she will have a far more powerful rocket engine than the famous Bell X-2, the fastest ship of the past.

The Lockheed X-17 is a little-known research missile but it is said to have climbed faster and higher than any other rocket—and it is powered solely by solid fuel rockets.

The X-17 was developed to test the nose cones of missiles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by exposing them to high speed flight in the atmosphere to simulate the effect of a 16,000 m.p.h. atmosphere re-entry. To withstand the impact and the metal-melting heat, nose cones were built of the hardest and toughest metals ; but now a new form of tough glass is being used.

During normal testing, the X-17, as it were, goes over to the other side and adds its rockets to the power of gravity. Stage One takes it up, it coasts to maximum height, the nose tilts and points downwards and then Stages Two and Three take over and hurl the rocket back to the Earth.

Aided by gravity, and travelling ever faster and faster the rocket, silently, blazes into an incandescent man-made meteor.

Hammering down at night, it can be seen flaming in the sky eighty miles away as its data are telemetered to Cape Canaveral and it finally disintegrates shatteringly in the Atlantic. This is a very effective and practical test, for 9,000 m.p.h. at low altitudes is equivalent in air resistance to 16,000 m.p.h. higher up.

As if in negation of the absurd idea of using rockets to thrust a ship towards the Earth, the inevitable occurred. Whether the firing mechanism failed or whether an engineer, unable to resist the temptation, deliberately rigged the controls, is not known ; but in May of 1957 an X-17 used Stages Two and Three to climb. It climbed 600 miles above Florida and reached a maximum speed of 9,240 m.p.h. during its fall back to Earth. At that rate, with only two more stages, it could have reached the Moon.

The story of the exploration of the upper air and the fringes of space will probably be told in its entirety one day—perhaps only as a few pages in a history book—but as yet we can only attempt to grasp the outline of the whole work that is leading up to the conquest of the space frontier, pinpointing advances in each field as they are made and correlating them to the big picture.

Often there are months of fevered preparation, weeks of waiting—and then failure.

But, sometimes, there is success.

One such success in August, 1956, filled in a tiny part of the overall picture and does illustrate the lavish resources now needed to cover just one facet of one branch of one science. This near-insignificant operation—except for its results—involved 650 men, a modern destroyer, USS *Perkins*,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and a dry-dock ship, USS *Colonial*, converted to act as a mobile rockoon launching base.

The small task force steamed seawards to a region of high pressure 350 miles off the Californian coast, a region known as the San Diego High where the scientists expected a calm area with little high altitude wind to affect the balloons. Their problem was to uncover one of the mysteries of geo- and astro-physics. When a flare occurs on the Sun the radiation from it blankets the Earth and affects the 50 to 250 mile high ionosphere fading out short wave radio. Quite obviously, this is an obstacle to efficient ground control of spaceships and to the constant communication that will be required.

The question was whether the solar radiation causing the interference was short wave ultraviolet or X-rays, none of which reaches down to the Earth's surface. Normally the ultraviolet penetrates further than the X-rays ; but a massive increase in X-ray intensity could, in theory, reverse this.

The plan was to release a rockoon at dawn so that the 5,000 cu. ft. balloon and its rocket cargo would float at a height of 16 miles, ready to be fired by radio the instant a flare on the Sun was signalled. The rocket would then rise upwards at 70-G through the balloon at a seven degree angle to miss the radar reflector, and continuously monitor ultraviolet and X-ray intensities to a height of about 60 miles.

Thus there would be an interval only of seconds between the signalling of the flare and the arrival of the rocket probe in the affected ionosphere, whereas it would take the balloon ninety minutes to reach the firing height, hopelessly overdue. USS *Perkins* used her modern radar to track the balloons to make sure they were fired before they drifted out of the 125 mile range of the telemetering equipment.

On the first day no flares were reported and the rocket was duly fired at sunset.

The following day there was a flare a few minutes after midday. The rocket was immediately fired. Probing upwards, its signals were automatically recorded in the launching ship and, within minutes, the scientists knew without a doubt that radio fade-out is due to a fantastically intense burst of X-rays coursing deep into our atmosphere.

The next objective? To discover if even more energetic X-rays of shorter wavelength are absorbed much higher in the air.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The summer of 1957 has been the great testing time for missiles. Although guided missiles were produced by a working force of 25,000 and sales had soared to £160 million a year, these were mainly small rockets. The giants—Jupiter, Thor, Titan and Atlas are still in the testing stages. The one and threequarter million horsepower engines of Atlas and Titan, the ICBMs, cost about £100,000 apiece. Cost accountants had more to worry about than the missilemen when Atlas exploded—the scientists knew why and what they could do about it ; the money had gone for good.

The USAF's IRBM, Thor, also crashed during the critical takeoff period ; but the Army's Jupiter IRBM was test-fired successfully from Cape Canaveral at the end of May.

The USAF has announced that it has an anti-missile missile well into the design stage. Success in this field could easily mean a return to the stalemate of defensive measures catching up with offensive weapons.

All these incidents, these successes and failures and fresh discoveries, are stepping-stones on the path to the first true spaceship. Without them, we would not leave Earth ; at least, leave it via the dignity of a spaceship as opposed to the crass stupidity of a hydrogen weapon.

And already the step beyond the chemical rocket is being charted. News has been released that two of the AEC's laboratories, those at Livermore, are working on nuclear propulsion for rockets. What has not been explained is whether the main idea is for an ion drive developing low thrust for long distances, a shaped-charge A-bomb to blast missiles into space at enormous accelerations, or whether a nuclear pile is intended to heat a working fluid to 5,000 degrees Centigrade and eject it after the style of a chemical rocket. To be efficient, the latter method would require the pile and jet chambers to function at a temperature greater than the melting point of all known refractory materials.

In addition, North American Aviation have a contract from the USAF to investigate the suitability of ion drives for spaceships, proving that someone is looking beyond tomorrow.

Certainly, the way to the stars is being opened up by degrees with every week that passes, and keeping up with the details is a fascinating and rewarding undertaking. In these endeavours the scientists and the science fiction enthusiast are seeing their twin worlds brought into one during their own lifetimes.

Kenneth Johns

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT OF KIN

The following story is in the nature of a conversation piece and as such develops a rising tempo which is almost sure to catch the reader by surprise as the story unfolds. We feel that Robert Presslie is beginning to make quite a name for himself already -- and as yet he is comparitively new to science fiction!

By Robert Presslie

If my grandfather had known how much it cost to ferry me all the way from Pommard's Peak on Mars to Inchbuie on the Western coast of Scotland he would have choked on his whisky—which, to my knowledge, is a thing he has not done in all his ninety years, in spite of the fact that he gets it straight from a friend who works in a Dufftown distillery and drinks it neat, one hundred and three degrees proof notwithstanding.

" Ye'll take a dram ?" were his first words, before I even dropped my bags on the stone floor or had time to look around the peat-smoked walls and refresh my memory.

He poured me a ' dram ' that would have fuelled a spacer halfway to the moon. I blinked at the pool of liquor and blinked again as the fumes rose up and stung my eyes. I wasn't surprised he had used a horn cup : even glass has certain limits as regards insolubility.

" Ye mind that horn ?" the old man asked and I pressed a finger to my brow under the peak of my cap while I collected my thoughts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" My first stag !" I recalled.

" And a twelve-pointer at that, Davy."

The early days came back to me with a rush, the days before I had left the lonely highlands for a new world that could be even lonelier. I had been twenty when I left ; and now, twenty years later, I had retraced the steps which had taken me from Scotland to Mars.

I was scared in the ship that took me from Pommard's Peak to the Wheel ; after twenty years on solid ground it was strange to be in space. But it wasn't so bad in the ferry that took me from the space station to the Australian Terminal. And by the time I reached Prestwick in Scotland by trans-continental rocket I felt an old hand at travelling. In fact, the monorail journeys from Prestwick to Glasgow was so dull I fell asleep.

Nobody had been able to do much about the Scottish weather and with a few hours to kill before there was enough visibility for flying, I took the opportunity of dropping in at the university. Maybe it was national phlegm or maybe it was the fact that space travel was no longer a novelty—anyhow, nobody was particularly impressed when I said who I was and where I had come from.

Feeling a bit deflated, I went back to the airfield, signed a waiver to state it was my own fault if my neck got broken, and took the chartered copter up into the mists myself. A couple of hours later my ego was pumped up to size after a pretty neat piece of navigation.

I was back where I had started from. In the little room, warmed by the red glow of peat and lit by the yellow flare of oil, there was the old man, the dog and myself. Just as it used to be. In the midst of familiarity I found it easy to slip further into the past. Back, for instance, to the time I shot my first stag.

The old man—even then, when I was eleven he had seemed old—had shown me how to make my own silencer. We took six pennies, drilled a quarter-inch hole in the centre of each, cut them in half and soldered them round a length of perforated tube. Clipped to the muzzle of a rifle the tube made an effective silencer for anyone who wanted to get himself a hunk of venison without the gamekeeper knowing about it.

Of course he did know but could never catch us. We dug the carcase in, covered it with pine cones and waited for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

darkness. At night we hauled it to Willie Hill's farm. Willie would frown and shake his head and only reluctantly agree to butcher it for us. It's a funny thing, but for all the stags we brought down we never saw more than a shoulder or a rump from each. Willie's morals were expensive to corrupt.

Sipping cautiously at the whisky, I said to my grandfather, "It was a grand beast."

"Aye," he agreed. "A grand beast. Ye'll not find the likes of it nowadays. What with the forests being cut and they atomic factories everywhere, the hills are not what they used to be."

"That's progress," I commented. And since I was part of the new culture which had killed off the old I tried to warm the old man's heart again. "We ate well in those days, eh? Venison, salmon, trout. Trout! We must have emptied the loch with the whisky bottle trick—"

He nodded reminiscently. "Yon was a clever trick. If I mind right it was about then I decided ye would have to go to Glasgow for schooling. Ye were too clever for these parts, Davy. What was the name of that stuff ye put in the bottles?"

"Carbide. Calcium carbide and a drop of water. Remember? We put the carbide into a dry bottle, poured in some water, slammed the cork hard and flung the bottle into the loch. The wet carbide gave off acetylene and when the pressure of gas became too much the bottle exploded. We used to wade out and pick the stunned trout floating on the surface."

I thought the memory might have raised a smile but he just shook his head.

"Gone," he said. "Gone forever. They've fouled the water with that radium stuff."

I knew what he meant but I didn't make the mistake of correcting him. I bent forward to pat the sleeping dog and tried again.

"We nearly killed Old Shep once—that time he swam after the bottle."

Still no smile. He too patted the dog. "He's none the worse for it," he said and I realised that for him there had been only one Shep. This dog was seventh or eighth in line but to my grandfather all seven or eight were one dog, one dog which had been faithfully at his heel for nigh on ninety years. Memories merge in old age.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked at him closely. Once he had been tall as a pine and just as straight. Now he was as slim as ever but he seemed to be knotted the way a pine never is. His face was earth-brown—what could be seen of it for he had always been an incredibly hairy man ; beard, moustache and hair formed a continuous auburn mat through which two pale blue eyes stared steadily at the world and its passing.

" How long are ye here for ?" he asked.

" As long as you'll have me."

As long as he lived would have been more truthful but you don't say things like that.

" It must have cost a penny or two," he said.

" The government paid." The truth this time. Those who criticise bureaucracy and officialdom would have been dumb-founded at the benevolence which had thought of bringing pleasure to the last few months of an old man's life by giving him back for a little while his only living relative.

" They must have money to burn," he said gruffly. Yet I knew he was pleased.

" It goes with the job," I explained. " Three months leave on Earth for every year of service on Mars, with full salary and all expenses paid. It's not like the old days when the colonies were a liability and money had to be poured into them by the billion. Mars is self-supporting now."

I didn't tell him the rest of it : that most of our wealth came from our export of elements ninety-three to a hundred-and-eight inclusive. He might not have understood.

But apparently he did. " Better you than me," he said. " All that radium stuff ye make must be dangerous."

" There's no danger. The breeders are 'way out in the deserts, hundreds of miles from the colonies. Anyhow, you don't have to worry about me. My stint is over. I've been pensioned off."

" At your age ? Ye're a young lad yet."

" Not on Mars. They used to send them home after six months service. That was in the beginning, before the women came, when six years was as much as a man could stand separated from civilisation. Now that they have a complete culture of their own that doesn't apply—"

" What about you ? "

" Well," I admitted. " There is a certain amount of global radiation from the breeders. It isn't at a lethal level but they send you home after twenty years just in case. I've done my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty years. For the next five years I draw full salary. After that—"

"Ye'll go back?"

"No. I've got a bit of money saved and I can always get a job here."

My grandfather nodded approval. "Quite right, Davy. There's no sense in going back to get poisoned. Although, mind ye, they must still be making a lot of atoms here and it's not all that safe even on Earth."

I had to put him right on that point. "You're thinking of the trout that aren't in the loch any more? They'll come back when the waters are cool enough, which shouldn't be too long. The old power station at the head of the loch hasn't been used for years. Every scrap of radioactive material comes from Mars now. The days of pollution are over."

"So they say," he muttered. He didn't sound at all convinced. However, there would be plenty of time in the days to come to explain away his doubts. It was getting late. It seemed years since I had been in bed. And the potent immature whisky was making its effect felt too.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," I said. "Tonight I'm too sleepy. Is my old room still through there?"

"As it's aye been since you were orphaned on your mother's side and came here looking like a starved sparrow. I'll light the lamp."

"Never mind. I won't be reading," I assured him and picked up my bags. Shep stirred, cocked his ears and looked at me expectantly as I unzipped the smaller bag and took out my pyjamas. He went back to sleep when I stroked his muzzle and told him there was nothing in the bags for him.

Then I remembered I had brought something back from Mars—not for the dog but for my next of kin. Knowing the old man I had realised his Scottish pride would be offended by a gift of material value and I had chosen something which couldn't possibly be construed as charity. I dug it out of a corner of the small bag and held it out in the palm of my hand.

He stared at it and frowned. He looked up at me with a ferocious scowl, took another stare at my hand and scowled at me again. "What's yon?" he asked.

I poked it with a finger, turning it over on my palm to show all its remarkable beauty. In size and shape it could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been a glass eye. But glass eyes were never a rich amber in colour and no eye was ever as bloodshot with such a complicated tracery of red veins. And where the best of glass eyes has a dead look about it, my offering to the old man was alive. Not alive as in living and breathing but alive as an exciter vactube is. The little ovoid was older than Terran history yet I was sure it had been pouring out its effulgence all that time.

"What's yon?" the old man repeated.

"It's a souvenir. For you. I thought you might like something from Mars. This was the rarest thing I could find. And there aren't many of them to be found, I can tell you."

His 'Hm' was so noncommittal it made me look at him sharply.

"Don't you like it?" I asked.

"Ye say it's from Mars and they're scarce as trout in the loch?"

"Almost. The general belief is that they belong to the Martians. When the engineers were deep-digging in the desert to lay the foundations of the biggest breeder, they came to a stratum showing all the signs of a long-lost civilisation. The stratum was far far down. Compression, corrosion and time had destroyed most things, made them impossible to recognise"

"Then how do ye ken it belonged to the Martians?"

"The bone-rattlers read the faint signs," I explained. "We've had a pilot team of archaeologists out there since the beginning but there were no pickings for them, not until the excavators opened up the big hole. Don't ask me how they managed to piece the signs together. All I know is I'm sure they were right. There were Martians sure enough."

Once again the old man said, "Hm!"

He got out of his chair and fumbled among the china dogs, empty cartridge cases, clay pipes, fish hooks and the rest of the bric-a-brac that cluttered the mantel shelf. He found what he wanted and lowered himself back into the horse-hair chair.

Nodding his head backwards and forwards as old men do when making a decision, he thrust a great gnarled fist right under my nose.

"Hard to come by?" he asked accusingly. "Belonged to the Martians, eh?"

And he uncurled his arthritic fingers to reveal the twin of the souvenir I had brought from forty million miles away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I never did get to bed that night. The travel fatigue went when my eyes popped open in surprise. As for the soporific effect of the whisky—well, I was so wide awake and jumpy the first thing I did was hold out the horn cup for another wee 'dram.' However, I should hate anyone to think I passed the night in a half-witted drunken daze. I remember everything that was said as clear as could be.

My first question tripped out automatically. "Where did you get that?"

"In the hills."

"You shouldn't be climbing at your age—"

"A man has to get fresh air somehow."

His statement didn't answer the real meaning behind my question and I had to put it again in plainer form. "Are you sure you didn't get it somewhere else? From another spacer for instance?"

"And how would that be happening? There's not many visitors this way, none that ever gave me anything for nothing and I certainly wouldn't be buying precious stones. Besides, isn't the cairngorm as bonny a stone if I wanted the likes?"

I let that slide. There was nothing to be gained in arguing the merits of Scottish and Martian jewellery. He was obviously telling the truth. The thing to discover was how the golden ovoid had come to be found on the top of a hill some forty million miles from its place of origin.

With the slow deliberation of old age, the story gradually came out. Although it took my grandfather nearly an hour to give me the facts, they were so immersed in side-track reminiscences and irrelevant details that they amounted only to what could be said in a single sentence: the old man had found the stone at the top of a hill. Which was what he had told me in the first place.

When he had finished talking I went into a huddle with myself in search of an explanation. One good thing about old people is that they don't mind silences. I was able to give the problem complete concentration.

In theory there was no problem. The stone was Martian and Mars was far from Earth. It was impossible for the stone to be on Earth and therefore there was no problem. But theoretical possibilities had been wrong before. The stone *had* been found on Earth and ergo there *must* be an explanation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The likeliest one was also the weakest—that another spacer had brought it back and lost it on a hill in Scotland. The least likely explanation was two-faced : the extinct Martians had been nothing less than long-forgotten Terran emigrants, or Terrans were descendants of Martians who had come to Earth before the dawn of history. Either way it was far from convincing.

Getting no place on my own, I made conversation again. Thinking aloud sometimes helps.

" It doesn't make sense," I said. " A Martian burial stone in the wilds of—"

" Burial stone ?" the old man interjected.

" That's what the archaeologists say. Apparently the stone isn't naturally occurring but is man-made. Or maybe I should say Martian made. They believe it works on the same lines as irradiated quartz crystals. That means it can store and release electrical power. But it is as far in advance of piezostatic crystals as an ion-ferry is in front of a wheelbarrow."

For the moment I forgot he was a semiliterate old man and rattled on without thought of how much he understood.

" Martians are extinct," I said. " Yet no Martian ever died completely. It seems they had a waiting ceremony between the death of the body and its disposal. Just like we have. During that period the corpse wore one of these amber stones on his forehead. It was the centre piece of a chain of metal—probably gold or some other noble element. When the corpse was disposed of it was really an empty shell. The Martian was in the stone."

Surprisingly, the old man didn't snort or scoff or even shake his head. He actually nodded for me to go on.

" The body was finished, gone for ever. The mind, soul, ego—call it what you please—was locked in the stone. If you understand about cerebral currents it is easy enough to accept."

My grandfather nodded again. He asked, " Do you know the purpose of the stones, what they were used for after the owner was gone ?"

" Well, there was no actual evidence but probably the relatives or friends of the deceased took the stone and added it to a family chain. When that relative or friend put the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

amulet on his head the dead man was alive again. His thoughts were there in the stone, ready to be tapped at any time simply by the wearing of the chain."

"So the stone is one of those?" the old man said.

"It can't be but it is."

"Strange how it came to be here—"

"That's what I was thinking. I don't see how—"

"*How* isn't important, Davy. It's the *why* ye should be thinking about. Why did the Martians send or bring the stone here? Can ye find an answer to that?"

I could. But I wasn't sure if the old man was the right one to tell it to. There was something I had to know first.

"Maybe the stones themselves have the answer," I said. "Did you ever by any chance bring your one into contact with your head?"

He studied me a full minute before answering: "Did you?"

The old man was being as cautious as I was. I thought his caution was significant. Certainly it left me no option but to come right out into the open. Further prevarication would get me nowhere.

"I'm not your grandson, Mister Ferguson." I put it bluntly and watched for his reaction. He just waited for more.

"David Ferguson died," I went on. "He was killed when the engineers were deep-digging for the foundations of the big breeder I told you about. There was an explosion. The experts said a gas pocket must have been hit. That was how the layer containing Martian relics was found. I was one of the first to get a stone. David Ferguson had been struck on the head by it. I found it lying against his temple."

The old man was leaning forward in his chair. "The rest, Davy," he said urgently. "Tell me the rest!"

"He was my father," I said quietly.

"What else?"

"It was lucky I found that particular stone. Because, through its powers, your grandson isn't altogether dead. I am David Ferguson. I am two Davids, the father and the son. I am also one other—a Martian who knows who he is, whose body he occupies and where he is. He does not know why he is here. That is the real reason why I, why *we* came to see you."

Once more the old man gave me a searching look before answering. And once more his answer was another question.

"What made you think I could help?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Nothing, no reason at all. I simply felt it was the right thing to do. Getting here was easy. I told them you were old, that you were my only surviving relative and asked permission to bring you news of the accident myself. They agreed."

"Everything worked out right, didn't it?"

"In what way? Do you mean your stone might have the rest of the story?"

"Partly," he agreed and added, "Your father was top man on Mars?"

"Supreme Colonial Director," I said proudly.

"Who chose the site for the big breeder?"

"He did, of course."

"Who said exactly when the engineers should start digging on the day of the explosion?"

"He did."

"And was this by any chance the first time he had personally observed such an operation?"

"It was. But—"

"—but this was a bigger project than usual," he finished for me. "Well maybe it was but don't you think the site, the time and his presence there and then might mean something?"

"Such as?"

"Such as he was meant to be killed, you were meant to find the stone and I was meant to find another."

Before any of the three personalities in my mind could see where he was leading he gave me one more clue.

"I'm not your grandfather! And yet I am. But like you, I too am another."

"A Martian?" I gasped and knew immediately from his expression that I was right.

Just as my original story had been less than the truth, so was his. The real story as he proceeded to tell it was longer and more complicated.

The stone in his possession had certainly been found on a hill in Scotland—but not by him. He didn't know when it had first been discovered except that it had been in the family for many generations. For a long time now there had been a Martian co-existing with the Fergusons.

Through Ferguson eyes the Martian had watched man's recent progress. He had seen the first fumbling attempts at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rocketry. He had read of the moment when the moon had been reached. He had listened to the radio report of the first landing on Mars. And he had been waiting.

In due course the secret of the stone was passed to the old man. And it was in his time that the long-awaited opportunity came. He bred and fostered in David Ferguson a burning desire to become a Martian colonist.

"You see," the old man said, "the other thing I had been watching was getting very close. Nuclear destruction—instantly in war or slowly in peace—was becoming inevitable. I think I got your father to Mars at the right time. I hope you can carry on the job."

I had two questions. "What job?" I asked. "And how much did my father know?" Then I thought with my father's thoughts and learned that he had known nothing.

The old man explained that sending David Ferguson to Mars had accomplished one vital thing: the end of the manufacture of fissile material on Earth. It was on the old man's suggestion that David had proposed and instigated the Martian breeders.

"But," said the old man, "it took him away from me and away from the stone that was his inheritance. Fortunately the one within me knew what to do. Together we decided on a course of action."

"You killed him!" I accused.

"I knew exactly where to tell him to dig, exactly where we would find you. The inner you which was acquired from the stone. I've been waiting a long time for you."

"Why me?"

"Not all of you. Not David Ferguson the senior. Only you the son and you the other. The son had to be brought here for his inheritance; this body is getting very old and will soon be gone. The other had to be found for the thing he knew."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say I knew nothing of any importance when my mind changed gear and slipped into another personality.

"Of course," I said. "We vowed we would never let it happen again. Not after what happened to Mars, our own world. How many stones to how many planets did we send off in our last doomed days? A thousand? A million? And how many were lost or never arrived?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old man touched my hand. "One arrived," he said. "And one was sufficient. I remembered what I had to do but I had to wait a long time. Now you're here I can let this old body slip aside. You are the leader, the one with the secret of how to neutralise nuclear weapons."

"It's a pity I didn't learn in time to save our own world."

"It will be enough to have saved one world," the old man said.

He got up, tall and gaunt, and opened the door. I joined him. We stood several minutes looking at the dark landscape, the deep night sky and the faint sparkle of countless distant stars.

"A good world," he sighed. "It's worth saving. I'm glad I finally managed. Now I won't mind going to sleep again when this body dies."

I put a hand on his shoulder and pointed the other at the stars.

"You're not going anywhere," I said. "Not to sleep anyhow. When we've finished here we shall still have a lot to do. There must be other worlds that need saving from themselves. Right now there isn't much we can do about that, but as man reaches out to the stars we'll go with him. My son or my son's son will take me with him. He'll take you too."

He protested honourably. "You must survive, yes. But I was only the architect of events."

"You did a good job. You can help me with the others. Besides, on both sides of the family you are my next of kin. Let's go inside and get your stone."

As we closed the door, I reached into a pocket for the chain I had been saving.

Robert Presslie

Have you seen the First Issue of

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

Now On Sale ***Price 2/-***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is nine months since we published a story by Mr. Rayer and we freely admit that we have missed his refreshing style and plot twists. As a technical radio man, however, he has been writing countless technical articles and fiction has had to wait its turn. The "turn" in this instance being a particularly interesting item of still life in the form of alien paintings

PAINTERS OF NARVE

By Francis G. Rayer

Powdery sand drifted across the rock walls, obscuring the ranks and lines of pictures. Ageless, unchanging, the painted forms seemed as eternal as the never-ending whisper of winds that had moaned over the Mountain of Narve since the planet began . . .

Chris Batley pushed up his goggles and wiped the sweat from his pale forehead. Fine sand left two rings where his goggles had rested, outlining eyes that were quick and with an odd disparity of colouring. One was dark blue, the other almost white. That, and his slight squint, had gained him the tag of bat-eyed Batley.

"Another mile will see us there," he said.

He walked round the truck, which stood with rubber tracks half sunk in fine sand. Eighty miles of desert separated them from the little ship that had brought them to Narve—the *Sunspot*, four-man scout now resting on solid rock somewhere far in the dust-obscured east. The early part of the journey had been easy, over undulating rock. Then the sand had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

started. Now, upon rising slopes that terminated in the high peaks of the Mountains of Narve, it was growing less troublesome again.

"Hard rock ahead," Chris pointed out. "Suppose we radio the ship we're camping here at nightfall?"

"Suits me." His companion nodded in curt agreement. "Do it while I climb the rise to see what's there before it's dark."

Chris felt objections spring to his lips, but bit them into silence. The more he saw of Joe Emerald, the less he liked him. Emerald both looked and acted rough. He ordered his equals about unnecessarily, in Chris's estimation, and was lazy himself. Chris shrugged, turned up the dust flap, and established contact with the *Sunspot*.

"Dawn will see us there," he said after brief greetings. He squinted over the hand mike to where Emerald was toiling up the sandy slope, ankle deep at each step. "We're camping for the night. The light's going fast."

"Very well."

It was Telford's voice. Chris recalled that Telford and Smith had wished to draw lots to see who would go on the expedition, but Emerald had argued them out of it. Two go out; two stay with the ship. That was reasonable. But Emerald's overbearing manner in deciding who should go had been not only unreasonable, but unpleasant.

"Radio us in the morning, or when you've anything," Telford suggested.

The carrier died, and Chris stowed the equipment. Emerald had reached the top of the outcropping. His head moved slowly from side to side, as if surveying something beyond belief. Then he beckoned, gauntleted hand waving urgently. Chris jumped from the truck, scaling the slope with sliding steps.

Emerald continued to beckon.

"It's more than old Sam Pullin said!"

Chris gained his side. The outcropping gave an extended view over the ridge. Shifting sand had ceased to carpet the vale, and rocky shelves projected from it. Daylight was going, long shadows creeping across the exposed valley. But the expanses of rock which flanked both sides of the vale were still illuminated. Flat as carved tablets, they receded in vast perspective. Upon them were painted row upon row and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rank upon rank of figures, ill-assorted battalions of weird diversity. Tall, humanoid shapes stood side by side with unimaginably strange creatures of many legs ; beings that could have been men flanked those of alien and terrible aspect. There was no pattern, no regularity. Only painting beyond painting, creature beyond creature, receding into the obscured distance.

" Just as well we decided not to go further tonight !" Emerald stated.

He slapped a hip with a glove, and Chris noted the triumph in his voice.

" You feel we haven't come to Narve for nothing ?"

" Doesn't that prove it ?" Emerald's arm took in the paintings. " Old Sam Pullin was never a man for lies. And he hadn't the imagination to invent *that*."

The light was going. The paintings were fading slowly into the dim, obscuring purple of coming night. Chris shivered, turning away. The wind seemed cold. His light left eye twitched, as always when he was under stress.

" You were a bit rough on Sam," he said.

Emerald grunted contempt. " He should have known better than to start a tale like his in my hearing, then dry up when the point was coming."

Half sliding down towards the truck, Chris kept his silence. He had learned that art while in Emerald's company. But it did not prevent him remembering. Old Sam Pullin had perhaps drunk a bit too much ; but so did many a returning explorer. He had talked too much, also. So did most of them. But unfortunately Emerald had heard, and had pushed a few of Sam's remaining teeth down his gullet, to get the end of the story. It had not been pleasant.

" I'd have been a fool to let a man like Pullin keep it to himself," Emerald said, descending behind Chris.

" We could have let him in on a share—"

" A split too many is a fool's game !" Emerald spat in the dust, helping jerk out the canvas which covered the truck. Narve was quite far from a minor sun in the Gemini constellation, and nights were chill and often windy. " What's more, old Sam wouldn't have come if he'd had the chance. Something scared him !"

Yes, Chris thought. *Something had scared old Sam.* Getting enough out of him to locate the Mountains of Narve had fully taxed even Emerald's ability to bully.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They settled down to sleep in the truck. The wind moved round them with many voices, whispering of odd things, stirring the canvas with ghosts' fingers. Chris wondered if it were a good thing that alien rarities were the most valuable find a man could make—and that old Sam had said rarities beyond description lay in the Mountains of Narve. But at last he slept.

They awoke with dawn, radioed the *Sunspot*, removed the canvas and drove the truck up the slopes towards the valley. Emerald was openly bragging. Chris sat silently behind the wheel, hating him. Not for nothing had spaceport toughs called Emerald the jewel of roughs.

"You're too quiet, Batley," Emerald said sarcastically as they left the last of the loose sand behind. "Even a wall-eyed dog could see we're in money—" His confidence of easy riches had increased his overwhelming self-esteem.

Chris screwed up his lips. Once, he had argued with Emerald. Words had changed to blows. Chris had also lost two teeth, and had been knocked flat while Emerald kept him down with a foot on his back. At thirty, Chris had seen enough of rough-housing to know just what the full treatment could mean.

"If you think me that dumb, why didn't you choose Telford or Smith to come instead?" he demanded at last, stung by Emerald's words.

Emerald chuckled. "Now I know why they call you bat-eyed. You can't see what's in front of your nose!" He paused significantly. "Likely enough Telford and Smith will want to see this show for themselves—*after* we've got back to the ship."

A chill spread in Chris's stomach. His left eye twitched. "You'd not—not *leave* them—"

Emerald laughed roughly. "Did I say so? But the *Sunspot* can be worked by two men. A cut two ways gives twice that of four ways. So consider yourself lucky you're here with me."

Chris's pale left eye glowed. At a pinch, the ship could be flown by one man at emergency controls! What was more, Narve was too far from ordinary trade routes for anyone left behind to have one chance in ten million of survival. If *one* man flew the ship out, it would be Emerald.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rise flattened, and the truck came upon the uppermost part of the slopes. The valley lay below, clear in the sun. Rank upon rank, the paintings stood silently. Each had an astonishing appearance of sustained life, imprisoned on the rocky walls by some master craftsman.

"That's painting, that is," Emerald said, voice hushed in amaze. "Assuming there's stuff we can shift, it'll make a fortune on Earth. Museums and collectors will bid to the sky."

The truck descended into the vale. Seen near at hand, the paintings were wonderfully vivid. The colours were clear and perfect, so durable that it was impossible to tell if they had just been completed, or had stood for uncounted ages. The dawn wind had brought thin trails of fine dust into the valley, but it was subsiding, leaving the air wonderfully clear. Chris halted the truck, getting out to view the nearer paintings.

A creature with large, round eyes, and brownish skin, stood delineated against a backdrop of tall reeds. It was painted in complete detail. One raised foot seemed about to descend upon the low herbage at the base of the reeds; two six-fingered hands were extended. The creature's mouth was open, as if in speech. Wonderfully lifelike, Chris thought. He studied the face. There was a hidden element of cruelty in it—something he could not quite define, associated with the eyes and lips.

"Ever seen anything like that?" Emerald demanded triumphantly.

Chris followed his gesture. A rounded, four legged creature was painted next to the brown-skinned being. Beyond it was a tall, almost human figure. Next came a full dozen similar creatures, all quite short, and dressed in blue garments laced across the breast. A tall being in some type of uniform followed. Chris's gaze moved on, and on. Sometimes types were repeated, but not in any regular pattern. And each face was in some way repellant. Skinned or scaled, hairy or clean, all somehow recalled Emerald's expression. Despite their non-human appearance, all had the same spark of personal rapacity, the same greed. The faces were masks that did not quite conceal their owner's nature.

He turned suddenly from the fresco. "Let's get on. It may take longer than we think."

They reached the truck and drove down the valley. Sand, swept over the hills by the wind, had given a level floor to a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surface once uneven. At one point Chris observed paintings only a trifle exposed, as if the drifting dust had buried them.

The vehicle stuck abruptly, rubber shod tracks whining on something smooth. Chris tried reverse, failed to move the truck, and got out. It was axle deep in dust and the spinning tracks had thrown back loose sand, revealing metal.

Emerald descended heavily, grumbling, hands in his jerkin belt. Other fragments of metal showed ahead, projecting through the sand. Chris eyed them.

" Seems we walk from here," he said. " Looks to me like a lot of abandoned machinery."

The projecting fragments could have been anything. At this narrow point, they blocked the valley to its sheer walls, and pitted circles that could have been wheels stood exposed. The abandoned machinery or vehicles had clearly rested undisturbed for a very long time.

They left the truck standing axle deep in the sand. It was Emerald's decision that they leave digging out until they had explored on foot. Chris regretted that it was the only truck, or other means of transport, the *Sunspot* carried. Telford and Smith could never make the valley on foot, from the ship, even if they tried. Which was unlikely, he thought. If the truck did not return, Telford and Smith would cut their losses, and fly out, possibly caring no more for the pair in the truck, than Emerald would for them.

A good marching speed could not be maintained over the ridged sand. Chris's food pack hung heavily on his shoulders, and he began to drop slowly behind Emerald, whose giant's strength matched his build. Once Emerald paused.

" I'm not staying in this valley more than one night, Batley. If you get left behind that's your fault !"

Chris slogged on, lips compressed, his mind a tight knot of hate. Emerald always brought out the worst in him. Chris let his mind dwell on what old Sam Pullin had said. Somewhere in the Mountains of Narve survived a people who passed down age-old wisdom and knowledge from generation to generation—the Painters. Old Sam had shivered at the name.

" We've not seen--anyone," Chris said uneasily at last.

Emerald looked back momentarily. " The Painters ? I've been thinking of them, too." He slapped his lined jerkin. " I can stop any trouble—if they make it !"

A gun, Chris thought. Emerald was armed. And not only for self-defence, but to gain his own will.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Painters must have survived tens of thousands of years, Emerald." Chris studied the remarkable images as he walked. "Ever thought that could be odd?"

"No. They're in a backwater. Creatures in a backwater don't need the same means of protection as when there's competition. No one ever got this far before—"

"I'm not so sure. Old Sam got here."

"And ran for his life in fright!" Emerald sneered.

Chris let it pass. He suspected that Sam Pullin had only been following some other man's trail, just as they now followed Sam's.

The valley grew narrow; the frescoes ceased. Blank walls of rock loomed high above, as if awaiting further paintings. A deep silence had crept over them. The air was motionless, compressed within the vale by its sloping sides, which drew closer until a gap only wide enough for a single man remained. They were twenty paces from the opening when a figure rose behind it. Majestic, a trifle taller than a man, he stood with folded arms. A simple cloak of many hues hung from his shoulders, reminding Chris of a painter's palette. It was, he realised, a symbol of his work. He was a Painter of Narve. He could have been a man, except for the cat-like luminescence and slope of his eyes. They were infinitely sad, kind, yet alive with inner strength.

Emerald halted.

"We want pictures—curios—rarities—"

The Painter did not move. Only his expression, and his stillness, showed that there was no passage. Emerald unbuttoned his jerkin, and Chris saw he was indeed armed.

"Move aside." Emerald's voice held unease, but also overbearing determination. When Emerald decided, he acted. He had courage, even if of the wrong sort, Chris would admit.

The Painter's eyes were sad. His lips moved in alien, incomprehensible speech. But the manner was definite. There was no passage. As he finished speaking one arm rose and he began to draw across a metal grille.

Emerald swore and his gun spoke. The Painter's arm dropped; he swayed and sank upon the rock at the foot of the half-closed grille.

"That's what the others will get, too!" Emerald growled.

Chris gripped his arm, halting him.

"We're only two—they may be hundreds!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emerald laughed roughly. "I back one blaster against a hundred paint-brushes any day—"

"But we may not be able to get back this way!"

"We'll make sure we can. I'll go on. You stay here. If anyone tried to close the grille, shoot him!"

Chris wavered, frightened for his own life. "I'm not armed."

Emerald thrust a second weapon into his hand. "I can spare one!"

He slid through the half open gate, eyes alert and gun drawn. Chris watched him go, watched him pass from view round a curve in the almost vertical wall . . .

Half an hour had passed when shots rang faintly far ahead, echoed, fading. Silence returned. Chris stirred uneasily, looking back along the vale for the hundredth time. It was peopled only by the paintings.

Minutes crept on again. Odd that the beings depicted by the paintings were so dissimilar, Chris thought. They could have been the inhabitants of a hundred planets scattered through a score of galaxies. And the ruined machinery back in the valley—Chris's lips grew suddenly white. His pale left eye twitched. It was odd that they had parked the sand truck just where the machinery had stood. Suppose there had been other vehicles . . . suppose the truck was parked just where other self-seeking explorers from other worlds had parked. Suppose alien beings from alien worlds had come, left their vehicles, investigated this valley . . . In his imagination, Chris saw scores of races driving scores of vehicles, each parked finally—endlessly—where the truck now stood . . .

A fusillade of shots sounded, nearer, then silence. Chris knew, now, that they should not have come. But it was too late. There had been no hate on the dead Painter's face, only pity. Singularly different were the painted faces on the rock.

Emerald came running along the path. In his left hand he held something which appeared to be a woven casket. In his right, the smoking weapon. Behind him came a dozen Painters, unarmed, but running to catch him. Emerald paused, turning, and Chris knew that he was going to shoot, laying into the dust as many Painters as his bullets would take.

Chris's finger twitched. The motion was half unconscious. The weapon kicked once and a neat hole appeared in Emerald's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back. Emerald spun, astonishment and an oath frozen on his lips, then fell. The woven casket flew into the dust.

From amid the Painters came a dim luminescence that surrounded Chris, taking the strength from his muscles so that his weapon fell unheeded. His legs gave, rubbery, and a quietness settled over him.

Dim images moved in the stillness, questioning. Infinitely wise minds probed into his, enquiring, seeking out his motives, finding his hate, his avarice. He had been with Emerald because he coveted wealth. He did not wish to kill, but had. Chris had killed once before, when a companion had tried to take from him his half of stolen money. A deep regret seemed to fill the luminous cloud, and come from other minds into Chris's.

The motion ceased ; the stillness congealed. About him, unknown forms moved upon unknown business, working. Then the motion seemed to cease, to lose significance . . . Darkness had fallen, then dawn had come. The dawn had frozen, windless, locked into endless sameness, like a stopped clock.

Chris gazed upon the dawn, mind not realising its unchanging aspect. Away across the vale, painted forms looked back at him. No wind stirred. Nor did any cloud move in the sky, which was frozen into the stillness of a picture . . .

Powdery sands drifted across the broad faces of rock, thin trails momentarily obscuring the ranks and lines of pictures painted there. Ageless, never changing, they formed part of a vast fresco, durable as the Mountains of Narve themselves. As ages moved slowly on, dust covered a truck which stood like a skeleton upon the sand. Moving grains had long since abraded away every fragment of rubber tread and anything not steel. Dust crept slowly higher, but no man came.

Occasionally, a Painter would pass, bent upon his work, or immersed in reflections upon his age-old knowledge, important because it was his means of protection against the invaders of any planet. Dust trails whispered over the painting of a man, fairly tall, perhaps thirty, slight, with one blue eye, and one strangely white. He stood with a look of expectancy, as if awaiting a dawn which never came. Painters who kept their timeless watch in the valley sometimes looked at him, and at the other rows of figures . . .

Francis G. Rayer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE LONELY ONE

Mr. Silverberg's contribution this month concerns the last few humans on a dying Earth—in quite a pleasant setting. When they are offered transportation to another younger planet they refuse to go. For some reason Old Mother Earth is reluctant to be left alone.

By Robert Silverberg

Jannes very carefully guided the two-man cruiser out through the *Haughtsmith's* lock, while Norb Kendon paced up and down in the tiny confines of the little ship, watching the red dot of light that was Sol.

"I feel kind of funny about this, Harl." Norb stared at the small hard point of red light. "I feel like a kid going where the grownups belong."

Jannes said nothing till the cruiser was in free fall; then he wheeled around to face the other. "So what if it's Earth? Those wild men down there can't be anything to get sentimental about. That's your trouble, Norb—sentiment. You haven't learned, have you?"

Norb repressed a tiny beat of anger that rose suddenly within him. "You know I'm not being sentimental. It's just that—just that here's the planet that gave birth to life, the source of all mankind; and here it is dead or almost dead."

"And that's not being sentimental, eh? What do you call it, then?"

Norb frowned. "You win, you long-nosed devil; I'm being sentimental. So what? Is it a crime? I just can't help feeling reverential right now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll lay off," Jannes said. A smile creased his face, and pulled his long, twisting snake of a nose into an even more grotesque shape.

The cruiser began to spiral down into its landing orbit. Jannes skilfully cut the orbit to minimum and sat the ship gently on its tail. He deactivated the pile, while Norb tested the atmosphere. "How is it, Norb?"

"What do you expect? Cold as hell, but breathable."

"How cold?"

"Plenty; five below. I hope the natives have some warm igloos for us."

"*If* we find natives, that is," Jannes rejoined. "We haven't heard a peep out of Earth for twenty years, and there were only a few hundred left then."

"We'll find them," Norb said. "Life doesn't give up so easily on this planet, methinks. Man'll stick pretty closely to his home world."

"Sentiment again," Jannes snorted, as they snapped open the lock and headed out.

The snow was soft and unbroken, and the two spacemen sunk into their hips. They floundered around in the drifts for a few moments.

"Hey," Jannes called, shouting to make himself heard over the whistling wind. "We'd better clear a path in front of us, or we'll never get anywhere."

They fumbled out their blasters and began to melt a path through the snow. The warmth fanned out around them.

"Which way is that colony?" Norb asked.

"Mukennik said due east, which is thataway. *If* it's a colony, that is; how anything could survive in this kind of territory is beyond me."

They pushed on through the snow, leaving a little river of warmth behind them. The day was dark with the perpetual gloom of a dying world, and the dwarfed sun afforded little illumination and less heat. For as far as they could see, there was nothing but the shiny glint of the snow, broken occasionally by the few twisted, leafless trees which pierced the white blanket and stood out sharp against the grey skies.

"Are we headed east, Harl?"

"Don't you trust the compass?" Jannes asked. "It says we're going east. Not that it matters much."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's just that I don't see any sign of that colony. If Mukennik could see signs of life from the *Haughtsmith* we ought to be able to find them from down here. And there's nothing in sight in any direction."

Jannes stared hard at the compass. "It says east is out that way; and we'll go that way. If we don't find anything, we'll turn back. Let Mukennik come down here and freeze for a while; I don't see why that greenfaced clown couldn't come looking for his own colonies, instead of sending us."

Norb looked quizzically at his companion. "Quit it, Harl. You know a Sirian couldn't stand this kind of climate, or else Mukennik would be down here without any coaxing. Besides, we volunteered."

"Yeah. I almost forgot that, didn't I?" Jannes wiped a speck of snow from the end of his nose. "Let's look real hard, yes? Maybe bring back a live Earthman or two for Mukennik's collection."

Norb said nothing. He squinted out toward the horizon, hoping to catch the slow rising of smoke or some other token of life. Suddenly he stretched up on tiptoe. "You see that out there, Harl? That look like a living thing to you?"

"Where? You mean that tree all the way out there?" Jannes pointed.

"Right direction, but it's not a tree; looks like a moving figure to me."

"I'll take your word for it. Say, is Mukennik serious about that offer?"

"I'm sure he is," said Norb straining hard to see the distant figure.

"He'll feel pretty foolish if we do find them. He'll have one hell of a time trying to fit them all aboard the *Haughtsmith*." Mentioning the ship reminded Jannes that he had descended from space in a ship, and he hastily turned to look for the cruiser. He was somewhat surprised to see that the trail they had blazed extended only a few hundred metres back to the ship.

"Look at that, Kendon; I was sure we'd gone farther than that."

"Must be your mind snapping," Norb retorted. "Say, that *is* a figure out there!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jannes stared and agreed. They began to shout and run as fast as they could—which was not very fast—through the snow toward the far-off shape.

The old man had caught sight of them as they ran, and was standing in the snow, arms akimbo, waiting for them to approach. He was waiting by one of the gnarled trees, and, Norb observed, he was as gnarled himself as the twisted tree he leaned against. He was very old and terribly dried-out looking ; Norb hoped he wasn't deaf.

" Greetings, Earthman," Norb said slowly and carefully once they were within speaking range. " We have come from the skies in silver bird." Norb illustrated this with his hands, and Jannes followed Norb's lead.

" Do you understand us, old one ?" Jannes asked, rolling each syllable out with care.

The wrinkled oldster smiled. " Of course I do, son. Why do you star-people insist on treating us like savages, anyway?" The old man's voice was husky and impossibly deep. " I've been speaking this language for as long as the both of you've been alive."

The two spacemen looked at each other in surprise. "Sorry," Norb said, smiling. " It's just that Earth's been out of touch with the System for so many years that we didn't know exactly what to expect."

" Quite all right, believe me. Welcome to Earth. Where'd you say you were from, anyway ?"

" Starship *Haughtsmith*, out of Vega II."

" Is Vega II a beautiful planet, young man ?"

" That it is," Norb said. " Our winters are only a few degrees cooler than our summers, and the Climate Constant is one of the best in the galaxy."

" Interesting," the old man said.

" We'll be glad to get back there," Jannes replied. " No snow."

Norb heard a low rumbling coming from the Earth. It grew steadily in intensity. " What's that ?"

" Earthquake," the old man said. " Means Earth's annoyed at what you said about going back. She likes to keep her visitors around for a while."

" We'll be here a while," Jannes said ; " and then we'll clear out as fast as we can—if we're not frozen solid first."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ground began to quiver and the two Vegans fell forward in the snow. The old Earthman remained upright calmly ripping up the bark of the tree with horny fingers and stuffing the pieces of bark into a sack as they came off.

" Guess you got her angry, all right. Come ; I've got all the bark I need now, so let me take you to see the king before you get into some real trouble. My name's Kalvin, by the way ; I'm just about the oldest man on Earth, I guess. McNeil's been expecting you for years—ever since the transmitter broke down." Kalvin gestured and led them off in a path through the snow.

Suddenly, the old man disappeared from sight. His voice boomed up from the ground below. " Keep moving ; the entrance is right in front of you."

The two spacemen moved cautiously forward, Norb in the lead, and felt the ground beginning to slope. Abruptly the snow fell away and Norb saw there was a slanting hole in the ground. He entered.

Kalvin was standing there with a knot of people around him. Most of them were old, Norb noted, all thin and knotty-looking. There were a few children, not many.

" Welcome to the capital city of Earth," Kalvin said, " the last survivors of the glory that was Terra salute you."

" Do you all live here ?" Jannes asked.

" All hundred and two of us," replied Kalvin, waving. "You see before you the guardians of man's immortal heritage. That's what they told us when they left us behind." He laughed raucously.

A tall man appeared from somewhere in the back of the cavern. Like the others, he was warmly dressed in animal furs, and in his flowing white hair was a crown made of shining metal. As he approached the spacemen saw that he was very tall indeed.

" I'm McNeil," the tall man said. Norb looked him up and down and decided he was almost three metres tall from shining crown to fur-swathed feet—the tallest man he had ever seen. " Welcome to Earth," McNeil said. " I'm the king."

Jannes and Norb exchanged uncertain glances. The space-manual didn't say anything about proper behaviour in front of kings. " We're honoured, Your Majesty," Norb began

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uncertainly. " We represent the Starship *Haughtsmith* out of Vega II."

" Just call me McNeil," the big man said. " Pleasure is all mine ; I've been expecting visitors from space for twenty years—ever since our transmitter went off. Sorry we had to hide from you, but when I saw your ship up there I figured the best thing to do was to cover up all traces of our city till we knew whether it was safe or not. I think you saw us from up there before we had a chance to cover up, because you seemed to know where to land." McNeil turned to Kalvin, who was standing nearby. " Hey, oldster, you've earned another."

The king took a strip of fur from his collar and put it around Kalvin's neck, where, Norb observed, there already were a number of similar strips. Kalvin smiled, bowed, and fingered the new fur strip pleasedly.

" Kalvin's our most honoured knight," McNeil explained. " The old dog's lived so long he's been knighted ten times over. I was hoping the spacemen would eat you when you went out to get them, leather-face." He gave the old man a playful shove and Kalvin backed slowly away.

" He said there were just a hundred and two of you," Norb said.

" That's right. There used to be more, but we're slowly dying out. This life isn't an easy one, and Earth seems to get colder every year. I won't give us more than another century, and then this'll be a dead planet. Come on, I'll show you a room, you can have while you're here."

Norb and Jannes followed the tall king down a winding corridor. Jannes was still too amazed to say very much, and followed along in silence.

" That's why we came," Norb said ; " we weren't sure anyone was left on Earth or not. But now you won't have to fight the cold any more ; we're going to take you back to Vega with us—all of you—and you can spend the rest of your lives in warmth."

" I'm afraid it's too late for that," said McNeil, " better forget the idea. Here's your room. The people will be putting on a dance for you to-night, and we'll come and get you when it's time." The king showed them a small room carved out of the side of the cavern, bowed, and vanished into the corridor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" I guess you were right," Jannes said, as soon as they were alone.

Norb smiled at the smaller man. " I guess so, Longnose. It's wonderful to find the home of civilization again isn't it? When we get them back to Vega, we can give them a whole village and make it into a living museum to preserve the ways of dead Earth. Mukennik'll really be delighted by this."

" Somehow I don't like it though," said Jannes. " First, Kalvin telling us to watch out, and now McNeil saying it's too late for them to leave. I smell trouble cooking."

" My father warned me to watch out for people with long noses," Norb said. " They find trouble where there's none to be found."

" Have it your own way, Kendon. You're so thrilled to be on Earth that you can't see beyond the end of your nose—which isn't so small itself."

Norb settled back on his bed of straw and did not answer. It had been an exhausting walk through the snow and now was the time for some sleep.

It seemed to be an instant later that there was a timid rap on the wall of their room. A girl tiptoed in and stood there. She was bundled in furs except for her pretty, somewhat dirty, high-cheekboned face. About eighteen, Norb judged, as he waited for her to master her fear.

" The dance is about to start, sirs," she whispered. " McNeil thinks you'll be interested." Having delivered her message, she turned quickly, and dashed away into the corridor.

" We'd better go," Jannes said ; " they're expecting us."

" Right." They wandered down the corridor toward where they heard the sound of drums.

All hundred and two inhabitants of Earth were gathered in the largest room of the underground village. They were massed in a compact group—except for McNeil, who stood in front, and two drummers, who sat at one side patiently pounding drums made of animal-skin.

" We're about ready to start," said McNeil. " We hold these dances regularly, but this is the first time we've had outsiders to watch. They're all very excited about it."

McNeil sat down at the side of the room, beckoning to the two Vegans to follow suit. " It's our only remaining art form to speak of. We had to discourage other forms of art because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they weren't useful ; but at least the people get some exercise out of this."

" What sort of a dance is it ?"

" It's really an historical pageant. It dramatises the history of Earth from its time of greatest strength to its old age. Which reminds me—are you still thinking of taking the Earth-folk off to Vega with you ?"

" Yes," Norb said.

" Forget about it ; we can't come. And don't try to get any of my younger men to come back with you. You'll be in for a surprise or two, I think."

" But why, McNeil ? Here we offer you free transportation, and all the comforts of the universe on a warm planet, and you refuse. Do you really enjoy living in this frozen hole ?"

" Whisper, please," said the king ; " I don't want to alarm my subjects. No, of course we don't enjoy living here. But it isn't as bad as it seems ; Earth's been freezing for thousands of years, and we're used to cold weather and nothing else ; we've never known any other. But that's not the reason why we can't leave. You'll find out during the dance. I think they're ready to start."

The drummers began to beat in a tricky syncopation, and the massed Earthmen in the centre of the room slowly began to move. They were interweaving in intricate patterns, moving faster and faster, winding around one another in snakelike rhythms.

" That represents Earth as it used to be," said McNeil ; " the crowded home of mankind."

Norb and Jannes watched as the motion became more and more rapid, the Earthmen entangling themselves in complex patterns and then patterns still more complex.

Suddenly there was a terrible pounding on the drums, and one of the dancers burst from the twisting multitude and ran toward an empty corner of the room.

" First interplanetary voyage," McNeil whispered.

The rest of the dancers continued to move in a close-packed mass. Then, another drumroll and a second dancer detached himself and headed for another corner of the room. " The second," McNeil said.

Now the dancers ran in more dizzy patterns than before, and a third and fourth ran off to corners. The drumbeats grew more frenzied.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here comes the exodus," said McNeil. "The big push outward that left Earth almost deserted."

The drummers practically went wild, as one after another of the dancers pranced out from the centre and headed for one corner or another, until there were more dancers in the clusters in the corners of the room than in the centre. Those in the centre began to move more slowly now, as their numbers diminished.

Only about ten Earthmen were still in the centre of the room, out of the original ninety-nine. They continued to weave through their patterns, but more and more slowly. One dancer finally pulled himself free and ran to the most distant corner. Another followed. Then another.

Finally, there were just three left in the centre, revolving slowly around each other. Their movements grew more and more tortured, and they writhed as if their feet were glued to the floor. Slowly they sank to the cold floor and stayed there, their bodies still wriggling. They stretched out flat on the ground, moving now a finger now a toe, but seemingly unable to rise. One by one they stopped moving completely, until the last one let his head drop.

That was the signal for a wild demonstration by all the dancers. They began shouting and singing, and the three in the middle leaped up and joined them. The dance was over.

Norb and Jannes sat transfixed. "That's our last art form," said McNeil. "What did you think of it?"

"It's wonderful," Norb said, suddenly jarred back to reality. "But I didn't quite catch the symbolism at the end. Why didn't the last three run off to join the others on the other planets?"

"I thought it would be obvious," McNeil said; "but perhaps it's just that I've seen the dance so many times. Look: they would have left but they couldn't; the planet wouldn't let them."

"What's that?" said Jannes in surprise.

"Earth is a very lonely world, Vegans. She's not getting much heat from her sun any more, and she knows she's dying. And she doesn't want to die alone. Just about all of her people have left her, but she's clinging with all her might to her last hundred-and-two. It's been centuries since any Earthman's been allowed to get off-planet. Earth doesn't want us to leave, and she's holding us in a tight grip."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't give us that, McNeil," said Jannes angrily. "I know you think that we regard you as savages, but that doesn't mean you have to play along. There's some other reason why you don't want to leave. Don't start spouting mythology at me. We know—"

Jannes suddenly spilled to the floor. The ground gave a convulsive shudder.

"Earthquake," McNeil said calmly. "It's pretty common now, every time the Earth gets angry—and I suppose you made her angry. I think you'd better get back to your ship before there's worse trouble. Kalvin, you'd better guide them to their ship."

"Wait. Before you let us go, we want to speak to our commander and find out what he thinks."

"What he thinks can't possibly concern us," McNeil said; "but go ahead if it'll please you."

Jannes began to set up the radio equipment. It was fairly simple work for an experienced pilot like Jannes; but for some reason his hands shook and it took longer than usual. He dialled in the *Haughtsmith*, and Mukennik's familiar voice crackled down to them.

"How's it going?" the commander asked. "We watched you go into that hole with the Earthman; what's been happening?"

"You'd better do the talking," Jannes whispered to Norb. Norb replaced him at the controls of the set.

"Trouble, chief," Norb said. "We found the Earthmen all right—a hundred and two of them—and they say they're the whole population of the planet."

"Healthy?"

"Healthier than we are. It's about five below down here and I guess that keeps them in shape."

"Are they savages?"

Norb looked around. A knot of curious Earthmen had gathered around the transmitter and were watching closely. "No, Mukennik. But they're—well, not quite civilized either." Norb heard a snort of protest from McNeil.

"What do you mean? Have you asked them to leave Earth?"

"Yes," Norb said. "I told them all about Vega, but they're not going to come."

"Not coming? Why?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We spoke to the king here and he tells us there's an Earth-spirit which is lonely and dying, and won't let them leave. He seems to say they'd like to get to a warmer planet, but they're stuck here for good."

"Oh," Mukennik said. He was obviously disappointed. "So they won't come at all."

"No."

There was silence from the *Haughtsmith* for a moment. "Well, don't try to force them," Mukennik said, finally. "It doesn't pay to meddle with tribal customs. Might as well give it up as a bad job and come back; we'll do up a report on it and let it go at that. At least we've found the legendary Earthmen."

"Yes," Norb said. "At least we've found them. Well we're going to head for our ship now; get the airlock ready to receive us."

The trek across the snow to where the gleaming two-man ship stood upright was a long and slow one. Kalvin accompanied them—the old man was seemingly tireless—and stared with apparent amazement at the ship.

Norb and Jannes began to climb the catwalk to the entrance of the cruiser. Kalvin stood below, watching.

"So long, old man," Norb said.

"So long," Jannes echoed; "we'll remember you on Vega. It's nice and warm there, you know. An old chap like you could live forever in that warm climate."

"I know," boomed Kalvin. "But I belong here. Farewell Longnose. Farewell, Squarehead."

"Farewell, Kalvin," Norb said, a little miffed at the nickname.

"Don't rush about blasting off," said Kalvin. "I want to be clear of the ship before you do . . . *If* you do, that is." The old man emitted a series of deep chuckles from the back of his throat and wandered off in the snow, heading toward his people.

Norb watched him retreat. "Well, that's that. They're funny people, these Earthmen; the cold has made them strong and—and sort of noble."

"You're still sentimental," Jannes said. "Take a last look before we blast off."

Norb stared out the port at the flickering red sun which so soon would be dark. Jannes reach for the firing stud.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hey!"

Norb turned and saw Jannes straining to touch the firing stud; his arm was not fully unbent at the elbow. "Something's wrong; I can't straighten my arm. You better come over here and push the stud for me."

Norb hurried over to the control board. "I'm not too sure how it works."

"Nothing to it," said Jannes, grimacing from the sharp pain in his arm. "Just reach out and push the stud."

Norb extended his arm. It did not reach the stud. "I can't do it."

He looked at Jannes with growing horror. "I can't touch the stud."

"Go ahead," Jannes urged. "Just push it." The pilot continued to rub his bent arm trying to straighten it out.

Beads of perspiration broke out on Norb's forehead. He tried to push his hand forward to meet the stud. "It's as if there's a wall around it," Norb said. "I can't get to it."

He tried again and then sat down in a rage of frustration.

Jannes reached out with his good arm. "I can't do it either." He looked at Norb, Norb looked at him.

"You know what I think?" Jannes demanded, quietly.

Norb nodded. "I think so too." He made another attempt to push the stud, and failed.

Norb stared out at the reflection of the red sun along the snow. Jannes watched him silently.

"But it's crazy," he finally burst out. "You don't believe that story about the Earth-spirit, do you?"

"I'm the sentimental one, remember, Jannes?"

"This is no time for bickering. Why can't we touch that stud?"

Norb said slowly "*They* believe in the Earth-spirit. Maybe the Earthfolk hypnotised us during that dance, and left a post-hypnotic command not to go near the firing stud. There's no physical reason why we can't touch it."

"Can we un-hypnotise ourselves?" Jannes joined Norb at the port and looked out over the snow.

"I'm just guessing that that's what they did. That whatever happened, they did it. But for all I *know*, it's the Earth herself that won't let us go."

"But that's crazy!" Jannes shouted. He leaped to the board and tried to press the stud. He made no contact. "It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must be hypnotism," he said. "I can put my arm out, but when I reach the stud I draw back ; I just can't bring myself to touch it."

"Maybe if you keep your hand there, and I back up into you, and accidentally nudge your hand into the stud—"

"It's worth a try," Jannes said. He put his finger as close to the gleaming stud as he could, and waited. Norb casually sauntered up behind him, whistling, and suddenly pushed.

Jannes screamed and held up his finger. "It's no use ; there might just as well be a wall around that stud."

Norb frowned. "Look out the port," he said, pointing. "Under that tree."

Kalvin was sitting cross-legged in the snow, about a hundred metres from the ship, watching and waiting.

"They know exactly what's going on in here," Jannes said. "I'll bet he's roaring with laughter."

Savagely he grabbed a length of pipe from the tool-cabinet and brought it down on the firing stud.

The ship stayed on the ground.

The stud broke off.

"Now you've done it," Norb said. "How do you plan to get up now? Do you know anything about repairing the starting mechanism?"

"Not much, but we don't have to bother ; I'm going to call Mukennik and have them come down and pick us up."

"Suppose *they* get stuck here, too?"

"At least we're no worse off, and we'll have company."

"That's not a very good attitude, Harl ; but I suppose I'm being sentimental again."

"Shut up." Jannes was dialling in the *Haughtsmith*.

"I thought you were coming back up," said Mukennik immediately. "We're waiting for you."

"We're stuck. We can't get the ship up."

"What's the trouble? Mechanical difficulties?" Mukennik sighed. "Or won't the Earth-spirit let *you* go?"

"We've broken the firing-stud."

"Use the auxiliary ; it's under the rear cover."

They looked. It was. They failed to make contact.

"We can't touch it," Norb said. "I think the Earthmen left us with a post-hypnotic command against blasting off."

Jannes looked out the port. "Kalvin's still there. Why don't we get him in here and get him to push the stud for us?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's out," said Mukennik; "we'd only have to return him afterward."

"What do we do?" Jannes demanded.

"Hold on a while. I'm going to send down the other ship to get you out of this, you idiots."

In a short while, the second cruiser stood on its tail in the snow not far from the first. Norb saw that Kalvin was watching with evident interest as the rescue-cruiser came down.

Two well-clad spacemen came dashing down the catwalk and toward Norb and Jannes. "Hurry up," one of them said. "Mukennik doesn't want to waste any more time than necessary. Kinnear's going to take you two up in our ship, and I'll bring yours in alone."

Norb and Jannes headed back to the second ship with Kinnear. Kalvin stood up under his tree and yawned loudly.

Kinnear tried to push the stud; he failed.

"Are we *all* crazy?" he demanded.

"It looks as if it's contagious," Norb said. He glanced through the port. "Doesn't seem as if Bartle's got very far with our ship either."

Kalvin was wandering in slow circles in the snow.

"Is there any way out of this?" Kinnear asked. "Let's call Mukennik and ask him to bring the *Haughtsmith* down for us."

"You don't think *he's* going to risk getting stranded here himself, do you?"

"He can't leave four men here."

"You don't know Mukennik then." Norb waved to Kalvin, who was still outside. The old man approached and stood outside the ship.

"What's the trouble, spacemen? I thought you'd be gone long before."

"We can't blast off," Norb said.

"Oh? Motor trouble?"

"No. You know what it is?"

Kalvin smiled. "We'll welcome you at our little village; it isn't often that we get new blood."

"Isn't there any way out?"

"The earth is a lonely planet," Kalvin said. "It wants all the company it can get."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Norb looked back toward the control room. Jannes was talking into the transmitter and Mukennik's voice crackled faintly through the air.

"What's happening?"

"They won't come," Jannes said. "He's awarding us all medals and leaving us behind."

"Leaving us behind? Why?"

"He wants to get out of the atmosphere fast. He's afraid this Earth-spirit will get him to bring the *Haughtsmith* down here, and that would never do. You know how Mukennik hates cold weather."

Norb felt an icy chill growing inside him.

"That's too bad," Kalvin said. "It would have been nice to have the big ship down here, too. We all could have lived in that instead of our cave."

"Yeah, too bad. I'm really sorry for you," Jannes said.

Bartle came trotting over from the other ship. They explained what had happened.

They looked up. The giant silvery form of the *Haughtsmith* was still circling in its orbit around the Earth. Norb turned and went back into the ship.

"They're starting to move," Jannes called from outside.

"Come on back in," Norb yelled. "One last try." They all crowded into the little ship except Kalvin. The old Earthman stood by the side of the ship.

Norb reached for the stud and made no contact.

"That's it," he said. "Let's go. Hope you like cold weather, fellow Earthmen."

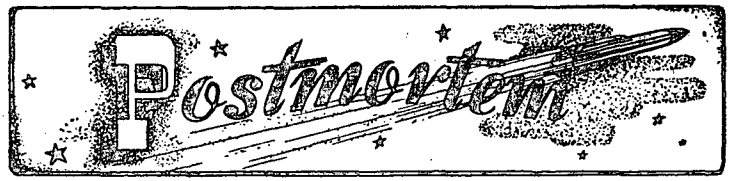
They climbed silently down the catwalk and Kalvin led them through the path in the snow toward the little village of Earthmen. There would be all the time in the world to find the answers. But right now, the air seemed warmer and softer, as if Earth was happy, now that there were a hundred and six to comfort her dying days.

Robert Silverberg

Wanted

American science fiction pocketbooks exchanged for British Colonial and Foreign stamps. Write to : Box G.T., Nova Publications Ltd., Maclaren House, 131 Great Suffolk Street, London, S.E.1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Castelford,
Yorks.

Dear Sir,

I have just read your editorial in the December issue. Your surmise about the "germs mutating" is absolutely correct and this is a direct result of the world increase in background radiation from atomic explosions.

We ourselves won't be mutating at an appreciable rate just yet, but the numbers of abnormal births is expected to rise and go on rising for generations to come unless we control the irresponsible factors in nuclear research.

As for your remarks on longevity, this will be reduced. This is based on statistical work showing that X-ray workers have a markedly lower life expectancy than others in the medical profession.

Dr. P. D.

Clacton-on-Sea,
Essex.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

I have a very big grouse on *New Worlds* which is backed by many of my friends, who also have your magazine each month. This is that your science fiction stories are becoming boring in nature and monotonous by their constant similarity.

I am fully aware that *New Worlds* is meant to deal with the mechanics of the future, but I think it is totally lacking in the human content. Almost every story is jam-packed with science and pseudo-science and become rather tedious as you read them. They are becoming this because they omit one thing—the human element. The characters portrayed in your stories are supposed to be people who will populate our planet, and maybe the stars in the future, yet to me they do not appear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as people. They are robots, totally devoid of human emotion and instincts and they do not strike me as people who will be our heritage. Your writers seem to forget that these future people will still be human beings like you or I, and will still possess characteristics which people have today.

Such things as love, fear, brutality, anxiety, and other emotions will never fade from people's minds and these emotions should be incorporated along with the science and mechanics of future civilisations. Stories packed with science and nothing else do not create, to the reader, a sense of reality. When I read science fiction I like to think, after reading it, that this is what could happen.

Some stories bring highly emotional scenes which are moving and real, but those which have succeeded in doing this are few and far between. Ted Tubb used to have this effect quite a lot in his short stories, and the latest one which I thought was of the same calibre was Robert Heinlein's "Menace From Earth." Mixed with these stories was the human element, the people were ordinary people, and not sexless, unemotional supermen and women. They had feelings which people possess today. They do things which we too would do under the circumstances. They are the people who will possess the future, and not supermen who never do anything which disobeys their moral code.

Maybe this is because there are taboos. Whether they are imposed by you or are commercially necessary, I would not know. To write stories about people of the future and eliminate sex cannot be done and still create at the same time a realistic outlook of that future. Without this the story stands out as being unrealistic and cannot be accepted as a literature. This is strange as, although women are quite often portrayed on the covers, they never seem to be female within the dialogue of the story. (*From a total of* 69 *covers we have only published* 5 *which incorporated a woman* ! —*Ed.*).

Another point is the plot similarity. I quite agree that science fiction entails space travel but every s-f story does not have to have that ingredient in it. There are many different aspects like Time Travel, ESP, and the psychological sciences which can be expounded. There are also many down-to-earth problems which can be realised by the s-f story. Undersea ventures are possible grounds if they are handled well. A recent serial had this as its plot but the story at large was written in a highly improbable background. There was too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much action and not enough realism in the story. As to your serials I prefer *Wild Talent*, *Takeoff* and *Star Ship*. I would prefer not to comment on the rest—they range from mediocre to ruddy awful. I dislike action packed stories whether they are written well or not, and usually they are not written at all well.

Bryan Welham.

R.A.F., B.F.P.O. 40

Dear Sir,

I have *New Worlds* on order, and admit that between a cartel of associates I read all s-f magazines whenever I can. May I applaud your current policy and by and large your stories.

In No. 67 I may add that the most inspiring and of course topical article was Peter Phillips' " Next Stop The Moon." Frankly I was very interested to see which s-f magazine—I imply Western s-f magazines, as I don't know whether the Russians publish any, though it is likely—would publish a

Continued on page 124

PLUS BOOKS

— *plus one !*

new branch just open at

54 SOUTHAMPTON ROAD, KENTISH TOWN, N.W.5.

Tel : GULliver 6453

(8 *minutes from Chalk Farm Underground.*
Buses 24, 513, 613, 639, *pass door*).

— same unique range of American mags and pocketbooks, with the accent on SF, naturally
— same standard half-exchange terms
— same hours, 10—7 (except Thursdays, closed all day)
— same cheerful service

as at our other shop at 131 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, N.1.
(TERminus 9260)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

credit note for Prof. Blaganravov's ballistic men, and found it amusing to note the " Astounding " preoccupation with " psionics !" (*Unfair criticism, Corporal—the American magazines go to press months ahead of publication. In actual fact, the January* 1958 *issue of* Astounding *has a seven page Editorial on the subject—one of the longest editor Campbell has ever written !—Ed.*) Nice work on your breaking the ice barrier.

As a very limited element of readership—i.e., me—may I state my background and consequent choice of subject. I am an aircraft engineer by civilian training, now regular RAF as I felt at the time of " signing-on " that the statistical effect of " deterrent forces " could be a major factor in world peace. Now things are changing, and Britain is pushing ahead with the " Penny dreadful " scientific concepts, frankly gaining a vast power of (albeit bankrupt) initiative. I found Peter Phillips' portrayal of Abner Oldcastle was, oh, so very good and very typical ! About my only similarity with the latter type is that I employ a pipe for " making points."

May I applaud the printing of " It's a bloody marvel. Good luck to them." I said exactly the same thing when old Laika took the plunge.

Finally, internal illustrations. I buy magazines for reading, and find illustrations space-wasteful and frequently embarrassing ; by " embarrassing " I mean that the casual book-borrower, a breed with which the RAF is over-established, becomes cynical upon seeing some of the bawdy, surrealistic or frequently monoline illustrations of the American magazines in particular. I can scrawl better drawings myself, as I particularly enjoy art as a creative form (N.B. hobbies : international standard model aircraft, gliding, sorry soaring, modern jazz appreciation, playing the guitar and writing my own music and lyrics—you know the type. Vintage bohemian. Bit big-headed. Good for a Soviet Hero of Sport any day. Also a bad letter writer).

There you have another increment of reader opinion. Hope you manage to make some sense of it.

Summing-up.

(*a*) Continue to leave illustrations out.

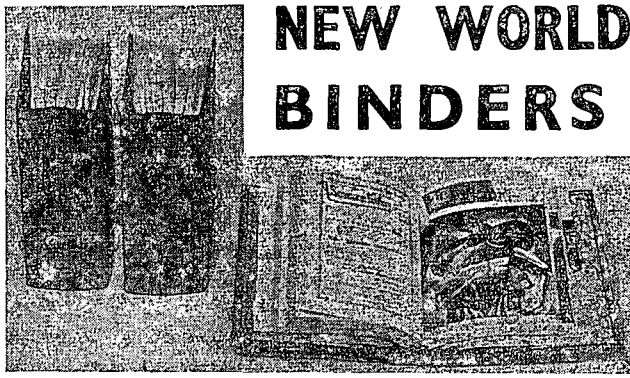
(*b*) Keep up the " Human Race Aspirations " department. I believe in man.

(*c*) Keep plugging the Commonwealth angle. The Government may see it.

Continued on page 126

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Do Your Own Binding Quickly



NEW WORLDS BINDERS

- Each binder holds six issues
- Simple to add or remove copies
- Flexible spines economise on shelf space
- In blue book-cloth, gilt-lettered, giving the appearance of permanent binding
- Complete instructions with each binder

Price 10/6 per Binder

post paid

NOVA PUBLICATIONS

MACLAREN HOUSE, 131 GT. SUFFOLK ST., LONDON, S.E.1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*d*) Try and keep the stories conceivable—" Threshold of Eternity " is a little far-fetched (I shall come to like it, don't worry. *Galaxy's* " The Stars My Destination " is also far-fetched, but I have come to look on it as a " Newest Testament ").

(*e*) Finally, thanks for your publication and keep up the good work.

I don't know how many physicists read s-f (99.9 or 99.99%) but it's the only way we will get the loopholes we need to establish a high I.Q., low mortality, high standard of living high cultural level ecology to this home planet of ours, and points beyond. Keep the ideas rolling from speculative non-specialist writer to specialist physicist, engineer, doctor, psychiatrist, psychometrist or what have you.

Indeed a clearing house.

Cpl. A. Anderton.

Longuerille,
N.S.W., Australia.

Dear Mr. Carnell,

It's quite a while since I last had the opportunity of commenting on *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*—unfortunately this is a rather hurried letter, being written at a Post Office table while I'm here getting a money order for a gift subscription to *New Worlds* for a friend in the USA.

Without being specific, I'll say that recent issues of both magazines have been really excellent. I'm very strongly in favour of the better paper being used inside but am still disappointed at the quality of the cover stock—something like that used on *Science Fantasy* 11 a few years ago would be infinitely better, I think. The cover art has merited such superior treatment and after all a great many people must judge *New Worlds* on its outside appearance.

I have enjoyed the serials since *Who Speaks Of Conquest,* and am very pleased to see some of them being reprinted in the USA. I have always contended the strength of a magazine rests on its presentation of novel length fiction—you have only to look back at *Astounding*—the forties will be remembered for *Slan* ; *Final Blackout* ; *The Weapon Shop* ; *The Weapon Makers* ; *Gather Darkness* ; and *Renaissance* ; *Foundation* and so on, even when the short stories are forgotten.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But I still feel that most of your authors, with the notable exception of John Brunner, are a bit too confined within a single frame, so to speak. While not denying the competence and other virtues of *Who Speaks Of Conquest*, *Tourist Planet* or *Green Destiny* for instance. I still think that there is far more room for more imaginative concepts. These stories are too close to home. Even in the galactic distances of *Who Speaks Of Conquest* it is impossible to forget the fetters of our present type of society. I cannot see that there will be no more change in the next thousand years than the development of spacecraft. In other words and departing somewhat from the above argument, 'there ain't no sense of wonder.' I cannot be much moree xplicit. *World Of Null-A* has it, *Gather Darkness* has it, *The Weapon Shop* has it, and so have so many of the others. And they are very different from the transplanted detective story that you've featured in *Tourist Planet* and *Green Destiny*.

Time for a change !

All that is not so much any sort of criticism of the individual stories you've given us as a warning that we cannot subsist on a diet of the same forever, without it palling.

Like Terry's covers enormously. Still want articles, editorials and reader discussion on the science fiction publishing field. High time you had a long Postmortem. Please lay out the contents page anew—most uninteresting. More novels complete or serial length, more " far treading " stories.

Peter Jefferson.

Hawthorn East,
Victoria, Australia.

Dear Sir,

I have been reading *New Worlds* since No. 4 and have the issues from that one onward bound in fours, in pale blue cloth, in my collection. The first three issues are missing. I know that they are damnably hard to come by, I have been trying for years, but if *you* should chance to know of any of them, in reasonable condition, please let the owner know that an Australian collector would like to discuss prices with him !

New Worlds has been consistently good throughout the years I have been reading it, and has had its share of noteworthy stories and, of course, a percentage of flops, but I will continue to purchase it while it continues to appear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Your magazine is reviewed regularly in our fan magazine " Etherline " by another member of our Club, and you should receive copies thereof.

We in Australia hope that you may long continue to edit, and Nova may long continue to publish *New Worlds*.

Bob McCubbin.

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Next month, all being well, we hope to offer you another great First in British science fiction, just as Eric Frank Russell's current serial " Wasp " is this month.

John Wyndham has just finished a new novel!

It is the story of the conquest of space as we see it now and how it may well develop logically and chronologically over the next two hundred years. Characterwise it is the story of six generations in a family involved in one way or another with spaceflight and because of the intervals between generations the novel breaks down into four separate and distinct novelettes. You will immediately appreciate the inference !

The first story, " For All The Night, " should commence next month ; we are having to completely rearrange our story schedules to fit this series in. Incidentally, the novel is unlikely to appear anywhere else in the world during 1958.

Story ratings for No. 65 were :

1. Manhole 65 - - - - - - J .G. Ballard
2. Sector General - - - - - James White
3. To Percy - - - - - - Alan Barclay
4. The Half Pair - - - - Bertram Chandler
5. Defence Mechanism - - Donald Malcolm

---

3 Complete Short Novels

in the first issue of

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

Now On Sale ***Price 2/-***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another famous Nova Magazine

128
PAGES
2/-
Bi-Monthly

Two well-known American writers combine to produce one of the most intriguing long novelettes in the next issue (No. 28) on sale March 14

WEB OF THE NORNS

by HARRY HARRISON and KATHERINE MACLEAN

Grant O'Reilly was a more than insignificant type of individual and when his wedding day dawned (much against his better judgment) there was not much he could do about it — but the Norns could. They accidentally transformed him into another world where he became something a great deal more than insignificant.

Also short stories by :

☆ *Edward Mackin*

☆ *John Kippax*

☆ *E. C. Tubb*

and others

ORDER FROM YOUR NEWSAGENT

NOVA PUBLICATIONS

MACLAREN HOUSE, 131 GT. SUFFOLK ST., LONDON, S.E.1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Nova Magazine

Action Packed Adventure Stories

in the first issue of

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

2/-

Bi-Monthly

NOW ON SALE

Containing :

3 Complete Novels by leading writers

The Slave by C. M. Kornbluth

Chalice of Death by Calvin M. Knox

Yesterday's Man by Algis Budrys

★ ★ ★

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES is an exciting addition to the existing Nova magazines — different too. The emphasis is on *adventure* ; interplanetary, bizarre, strange, but full of suspense and thrills. Don't miss YOUR copy

ORDER NOW

NOW ON SALE

NOVA PUBLICATIONS

MACLAREN HOUSE, 131 GT. SUFFOLK ST., LONDON, S.E.1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED